

In Search of Prophetic Theology:  
South African Political Theology in conversation  
with Anabaptism

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In Search of Prophetic Theology: South African Political  
Theology in conversation with Anabaptism

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South Africa.

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December, 2017

## DECLARATION

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Signed:  \_\_\_\_\_

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To Karen,  
my companion in life's great journey.

And to our children,  
That God may grant you the courage  
to embrace and embody the invitation  
towards a prophetic way of life  
that enacts God's peaceable kingdom.

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I have lived for many years in Latin America along with working in prisons and supervising a homeless shelter in Canada prior to living in South Africa. Thus I would not have considered myself naïve regarding the issues mentioned above. And yet South Africa has played a significant role in my ongoing thought development and conscientization. And for this I am so very grateful! So, I must first acknowledge and thank the beautiful – and beautifully complex – South Africa and its many courageous men and women – sisters and brothers – who have struggled and who continue to struggle for the peace and justice they desire and need. Learning about South Africa's journey and its ongoing struggle is daunting; yet it offers hope and inspiration when one sees how seemingly ordinary people do extraordinary things.

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# In Search of Prophetic Theology: South African Political Theology in conversation with Anabaptism

## *Abstract*

The South African *Kairos Document: A Challenge to the Church* (KD) written in 1985 continues to be critically important even 30 years after its release. Its ongoing significance is due to three inter-related dynamics: a) the process by which the document was generated; b) the insightful analysis and bold proposal it contains; and c) its functional utility as a base-line against which progress can be measured. It has indeed provided the challenge it suggests.

The purpose of this study is two-fold. The first is to offer a critical review and analysis of these three aspects of the document. The second is to recommend a few suggestions for a mid-course adjustment that could be helpful in the ongoing quest for ecclesial faithfulness within the South African context.

This thesis suggests that, although the KD emerged as an example of the Prophetic Theology that it proposes as an antidote to the dominance of “Church and State Theologies,” such a depiction has itself been co-opted in the twenty-two years of post-apartheid ecclesial experience. The roots of this cooption are, primarily, threefold: an anemic eschatological perspective as too-soon realized in the overthrow of the apartheid regime; a too-optimistic view of the inherent benevolence of state power once in the hands of the formerly oppressed; and an under-rated comprehension of the nature of the church as an alternative politic within the realities of empire.

This thesis further suggests that Anabaptism, a theological movement that emerged out of the struggle of re-defining the relationships between church and state since the 16th century, offers a helpful perspective as the South African church strives to take the next steps of faithfulness in its new post-apartheid political dispensation.

## Introduction

*Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage.*

*So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.*

*And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them.*

*- Exodus 2:23-25*

*The fact that [the Kairos Document] is written out of pain and suffering makes our listening to them not only desirable but mandatory. If someone is hurting, our first task is not to dissect the cry of pain in order to discredit it, but to take the cry seriously in order to respond to it. And if the cry not only goes, 'We are hurting,' but continues, '...and you, our brothers and sisters, are part of the reason we are hurting,' then we have an obligation to respond in such a way that the pain can be healed.*

*- Robert McAfee Brown*

*The cry of the Third World is not a passive cry of resignation to the realities of death. It is a strident witness to the persistence of life. The cry for life is not a cry of despair, sorrow, hopelessness or grief. It is a cry that denies victory to torture, detainment, starvation and military might.<sup>1</sup>*

*- the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians*

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<sup>1</sup> Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, K. C. Abraham, and Bernadette Mbuy-Beya, *Spirituality of the Third World: A Cry for Life: Papers and Reflections from the Third General Assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, January, 1992, Nairobi, Kenya* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 190.



South Africa's story is a painful one. It is a story marked by discrimination, separation, injustice, oppression, and violence. It is a story plagued by inequality. But its story also contains elements of resilience and hope. Similar to the context of occupied Israel in the first century whereby a small group – the *ekklesia* – dared to imagine an embodied witness of God's kingdom presence, so too has there been an alternative witness that has provided a ray of hope in the South African context and its overarching story of oppression and suffering. This alternative witness has embodied something different – a politic that has proven to be prophetic as it incarnated the type of relationships it desired; one where everybody matters and counts; where one sees the humanity and dignity in "the other".

The church in South Africa, unfortunately, has both fostered and challenged this story of segregation and violence. Some justified South Africa's segregation. Some struggled against it. And then some tried to remain neutral. The church in South Africa has struggled with its own schizophrenia.

In 1985, the South African *Kairos Document: A Challenge to the Church* (KD) emerged. It arose at a time of incredible intensity in the South African situation. The struggle against apartheid continued to gain momentum. In response, the apartheid government continued to increase the measures through which it would maintain control in order to preserve its form of rule based on white supremacy and racial segregation. Earlier the same year the apartheid government, led at that time by Prime Minister P. W. Botha, declared a State of Emergency which gave the government and its security mechanisms unadulterated power to respond to what it viewed as a crisis to its rule and social order. Vuyani Vellem describes the context well.

The crisis of death was intensifying as more and more people were detained and killed. Townships had become ungovernable sites of the struggle as they revolted against the tyranny and bigotry of the apartheid state. South Africa was indeed plunged into a crisis in which the state resorted to massive use of power, with almost every township having become a site of incursion by legions of the South African apartheid military forces.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Vuyani S. Vellem, "Prophetic Theology in Black Theology, with Special Reference to the *Kairos Document*," *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (2010): 1-2.

Given the context, Vellem describes the emergence of the KD as a volcanic eruption protruding out of the township belly during the State of Emergency.<sup>3</sup> It was a decisive blow of a home-grown liberation theology that challenged the injustices of apartheid and its ongoing colonial assumptions.<sup>4</sup>

*The Kairos Document*<sup>5</sup> proved to be a significant moment in the South African church's struggle against the apartheid government. It was a moment in time when some within the church drew a proverbial line in the sand and said "enough!"

The time has come. The moment of truth has arrived. South Africa has been plunged into a crisis that is shaking the foundations and there is every indication that the crisis has only just begun and that it will deepen and become even more threatening in the months to come. It is the KAIROS or moment of truth not only for apartheid but also for the Church.<sup>6</sup>

The KD indeed proved to be "a challenge to the church." All churches had to wrestle with their complicity with the apartheid system. The Church in general had to discern where it stood in relation to apartheid and the expectations it had for the way people would relate to one another. It was a watershed moment when all Christians – black and white – had to determine their response to this time—this Kairos moment. The KD highlighted how the Church itself was a site of struggle.<sup>7</sup> Not all Christians agreed with the characterization the KD offered.<sup>8</sup> But all had to, in one-way or another, deal with the implications of this document.

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<sup>3</sup> Vellem, "Prophetic Theology in Black Theology," 1.

<sup>4</sup> Vellem, "Prophetic Theology in Black Theology," 2.

<sup>5</sup> This will refer to the original South African *Kairos Document* and its process and not other "kairos documents" that have emerged around the world. These other Kairos documents will be referred to by their specific name. The specific *Kairos Document* referred to in this work comes from Gary S. D. Leonard, ed. *The Kairos Documents*, second revised and web edition ed. (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research, 2010), 1-35.

<sup>6</sup> "The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa (First Edition, Braamfontein, 1985)," in *The Kairos Documents*, ed. Gary S. D. Leonard (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research, 2010), 5.

<sup>7</sup> John de Gruchy and Steve de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa: 25th Anniversary Edition* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2004), 197.

<sup>8</sup> Vellem, for example, notes that some criticized the KD as being too emotional and therefore irrational. He says: "The criticism that the KD was too emotional simply attempts to portray the KD as an irrational expression of anger and, *ipso facto*, illogical as a theological document that should not be taken seriously. That we need to be always cautious about our emotions and be objective, that is, 'intelligent' when scrutinizing or examining matters is a logic borne out of this prejudice, which, itself,

The KD has also been a valuable resource for Christians around the world in speaking out against oppression and injustice. Since the writing of the KD in South Africa there have been at least eight other Kairos documents written around the world – all trying to articulate their own “*kairos* moment”. Each, in their own way, getting to the point of saying “Enough!” “The time has come!” “We cannot continue along this same path.”<sup>9</sup>

The KD differentiated between three forms of theologies: State theology, Church theology, and Prophetic theology. It portrayed State Theology as a form of theology that supported or provided the theological justification for apartheid and its policies. It portrayed the church that embodied State Theology as walking in partnership with the apartheid state and therefore contributors to the injustices the apartheid government caused. The Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) and the Dutch Reformed family of churches were the most obvious example of such a theological expression. The KD portrays Church Theology as a form of theology of churches that sought to remain neutral and apolitical regarding issues they perceived as “political” in nature; apartheid being one such issue. Churches that embodied Church Theology argued that the gospel, and therefore the church, does not and should not dabble in political matters. Although these churches may not have overtly supported apartheid, the KD argued that they allowed the status quo to continue – a status quo that maintained white privilege, which thus maintained a system that oppressed, caused injustice to, and caused violence against those declared to be “non-white”. In response to these two forms of theology, the KD challenged the Church to embrace Prophetic Theology, a form of theology that sought to actively dismantle apartheid and its social construct.

These three characterizations implicated every church in South Africa. It confronted each church with the question as to where it stood in relation to the apartheid system, its policies, and its government. Furthermore, the process in how the KD emerged proved to be a prophetic expression itself. It offered a prophetic witness precisely because it embodied an alternative politics in the midst of the dominant politics the apartheid government sought to enforce.

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is an abstraction of the very essence of rationality” (Vellem, “Prophetic Theology in Black Theology,” 2).

<sup>9</sup> For other Kairos Documents written see Leonard, *The Kairos Documents*.

## *Defining “politics” and “prophetic”*

In order to better understand the above it will be necessary to unpack the meaning of “politics” and “prophetic” and the way they will be used in this work.

### Politics

“Politics” is often understood as that which refers to the organs of state and their practices of governing or ruling society. This form of politics tends to be concerned with ensuring (or forcing) certain ways of acting in society. One could describe this as a state-centred understanding of politics – the state being the primary entity that determines and enforces the way society is structured, the way society functions, and the way it rules over its citizens. If one wants to change society, therefore, one must, according to this assumption, do so by influencing the state.

“Politics” has also, however, come to be understood more broadly. It can refer to the overall concern regarding the communal life of the city-state or *polis* and one’s actions therein. This broader understanding recognizes how even those who are not officially part of the state’s governing structure can still affect – indeed are integral to – the communal life within the *polis*.<sup>10</sup> One’s role and relationship to others affects the public life in the *polis*, and this is political.<sup>11</sup> One could describe this perspective as a more de-centralized form of “politics” that refers less about the activity of ensuring, forcing, or managing how citizens in the *polis* act, and more about the ways in which people relate and organize. This becomes political as they determine and take responsibility for the form of their own relationships in society. Indeed, they

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<sup>10</sup> Both the more narrow view as well as the broader view of “politics,” ironically, draw and base their perspective on Aristotle as a father figure of all that is political. Aristotle recognized and spent considerable amount of time on the administration of the state. And yet, he also recognized the way the (active) citizens of a *polis*, generally, are also political beings in that they perform critical functions in maintaining the *polis*.

<sup>11</sup> Dom Hélder Câmara’s often referred to quote demonstrates this well. Câmara once noted that “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist” (quoted in Zildo Rocha, *Helder, O Dom: Uma Vida Que Marcou Os Rumos Da Igreja No Brasil* [Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1999], 53). The act of inquiring why the poor exist and working towards the ridding of poverty is political action, which earned Câmara the label of “communist”.

determine the desired form of society. Such organization is not dependent on or determined by the state.

This broader understanding of “politics” will be the assumption in this work. It follows William Cavanaugh’s depiction where, rather than assuming that “politics” can only be enacted on the stage of the state as the one truly public space, “[p]olitics is what happens when people meet to deliberate about the structure of their common life together.”<sup>12</sup> Put simply, “politics” in this study will be understood as *embodied activity that determines the way in which people relate*.

There has been significant work done regarding the theological implications of this broader perspective of “politics.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, the need to offer further explanation or summary regarding this is not required. It is important to highlight how, if at the root of “politics” we are concerned with the way in which people relate in society, there are significant ecclesiological implications regarding such a perspective. Here Robert J. Suderman is particularly helpful.

In looking at Philippians 1:27, which says “Only, *live your life* in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...,” Suderman notes the different ways this verse is translated. The first part of this verse has been translated as “live your life” (RSV), while others say “conduct yourselves” (NAS), or “let your conduct be...” (NKJV). The word being translated here is “politics.”<sup>14</sup> Suderman highlights three things about this word. First, it is a verb. Second, it is an imperative verb, not just a descriptive word. And third, it is plural.<sup>15</sup> These are all important. “According to Paul, it is imperative that we (plural), as a church, act together, so that our common life is worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our life together (our politics) needs to reflect

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<sup>12</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, “Discerning: Politics and Reconciliation,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 204.

<sup>13</sup> Of particular importance has been John Howard Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994). Many others could also be mentioned: Oliver O’Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Arne Rasmussen, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas*, University of Notre Dame Press rev. ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); Paul G. Doerksen, *Beyond Suspicion: Post-Christian Protestant Political Theology in John Howard Yoder and Oliver O’Donovan* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2009); William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (London, England: T&T Clark Ltd, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Robert J. Suderman, *Re-Imagining the Church: Implications of Being a People in the World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 72.

<sup>15</sup> Suderman, *Re-Imagining the Church*, 72.

the mind and life (politics) of Jesus.”<sup>16</sup> Suderman therefore suggests another potential way to interpret this verse:

Make sure that your church politics is worthy of the gospel of Christ; or  
Make sure that your church understands its life as political, so make sure it is political  
in the sense of being worthy of the gospel of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

Stanley Hauerwas provides a similar perspective when he defines Christian salvation, which is typically assumed to be the focus of “the gospel”, as the discipline of bodily practices which is, by extension, political. Salvation, he notes, is a matter of politics – “politics as defined by the gospel. The call to be part of the gospel is a joyful call to be adopted by an alien people, to join a countercultural phenomenon, a new *polis* called the church.”<sup>18</sup> John Howard Yoder likewise suggests:

[t]he Christian community, like any community held together by commitment to important values, *is* a political reality. That is, the church has the character of a *polis* (the Greek word from which we get the adjective *political*), namely, a structured social body. It has its ways of making decisions, defining membership, and carrying out common tasks.<sup>19</sup>

In short, “politics” in this work will be understood as embodied activity that determines the way in which people relate. This study will, however, be particularly interested in forms of relating (i.e., in politics) that are “worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil. 1:27).

## Prophetic

The term “prophetic” also possesses different meanings. On the one hand it is used in reference to future predictions. A “prophet” may be equated with a fortuneteller. On the other hand, “prophet” is also used in reference to activists and

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<sup>16</sup> Suderman, *Re-Imagining the Church*, 72.

<sup>17</sup> Suderman, *Re-Imagining the Church*, 72.

<sup>18</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 30.

<sup>19</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Nashville, Tennessee: Discipleship Resources, 1997), viii.

activism.<sup>20</sup> Walter Brueggemann argues that neither accurately portrays the biblical understanding or portrayal of prophecy. Prophetic ministry, he argues, is to “nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture [of oppression and exploitation] around us.”<sup>21</sup> He notes that this dominant culture is typical of “empire” or what he describes as “royal consciousness.”<sup>22</sup>

The alternative consciousness to be nurtured, on the one hand, serves to *criticize* in dismantling the dominant consciousness. To that extent, it attempts to do what the liberal tendency has done: engage in a rejection and delegitimizing of the present ordering of things. On the other hand, that alternative consciousness to be nurtured serves to *energize* persons and communities by its promise of another time and situation toward which the community of faith may move. To that extent, it attempts to do what the conservative tendency has done, to live in fervent anticipation of the newness that God has promised and will surely give.<sup>23</sup>

As noted above, the dominant consciousness that needs to be criticized and dismantled is one centred on a politics of oppression and exploitation.<sup>24</sup> Thus, an alternative to such a consciousness is one based on a politics of justice and compassion.<sup>25</sup> Such an alternative politics, however, proves to be so radically different, Brueggemann argues, that it cannot be understood apart from its theological cause.<sup>26</sup> This is the foundational character of what he describes as a “prophetic imagination”: “there is no freedom of God without the politics of justice and compassion, and there is no politics of justice and compassion without a religion of the freedom of God.”<sup>27</sup>

The program of Moses is not the freeing of a little band of slaves as an escape from the empire, though that is important enough, especially if you happen to be in that little band. Rather, his work is nothing less than an assault on the consciousness of the

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<sup>20</sup> Walter Brueggemann makes these distinctions in his book *The Prophetic Imagination*, Second ed. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2001), xxiii. He argues that the “prophet as fortuneteller” is more typical of conservative Christians whereas the “prophet as social activist” is more typical of liberal Christians (Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 1-3).

<sup>21</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 3.

<sup>22</sup> See Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 21-37.

<sup>23</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 6. Brueggemann interestingly makes reference to Cavanaugh’s *Torture and Eucharist* and his depiction of torture as the imagination of the state (William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* [Oxford, UK; Massachusetts, USA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998], 279).

<sup>25</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 6-7.

<sup>26</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 9.

empire, aimed at nothing less than the dismantling of the empire both in its social practices and in its mythic pretensions.<sup>28</sup>

This was (is) done, he continues, through the creation of an alternative social reality – a community that embodies a different form of politics than the oppressive practices and consciousness of empire.<sup>29</sup>

In looking at the example of Moses and the Exodus event, Brueggemann demonstrates how Moses was not attempting to transform a regime. Instead, he was concerned with the undergirding consciousness that made such a regime possible.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, he was not concerned with the betterment of the regime through its repentance. Rather, Moses wanted the oppressive regime totally dismantled so that a new reality could appear.<sup>31</sup> Brueggemann uses the example of Moses to demonstrate how a prophetic imagination is not only concerned about criticizing and tearing down the violent, unjust, and oppressive political reality, which he describes as a “royal consciousness,” but also with the construction of a new reality that embodies an alternative politics of justice and compassion. It is a political reality centred on *shalom* – living in right relationships with others, creation, and God so that everyone may experience holistic wellness.<sup>32</sup> Waldemar Janzen describes the prophetic paradigm as a “comprehensive ideal of right living for all Israel.”<sup>33</sup> Prophetic witness, therefore, is to both criticize and deconstruct the oppressive, violent, and unjust realities that prevent one from living in right relationships with another while also constructing a community of justice, love, and peace; a community that seeks to embody right relationships or *shalom*.

This communal aspect regarding the prophetic task is important to highlight. Whereas it has been common to refer to particular individual prophets, Brueggemann’s description of a prophetic imagination demonstrates how such a stance is not – indeed cannot be – dependent solely on a particular person. Robert Wilson, in his *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, observes how early critical

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<sup>28</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 6 & 39.

<sup>30</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 21.

<sup>32</sup> See Perry Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, & Peace* (Nappanee, Indiana: Evangel Publishing House, 1987), 10-23.

<sup>33</sup> Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 155.



scholars tended to portray prophets as (divinely) inspired individuals.<sup>34</sup> “This view of prophecy,” argues Wilson, “gave rise to works that concentrated on the intellectual and theological aspects of prophecy, with the result that little attention was given to the prophet as a human figure intimately related to a social setting.”<sup>35</sup> In response to this, Wilson provides a larger social perspective from which such “prophets” emerged. He demonstrates how prophets were not lone voices but rather representative voices of engaged social constituencies.<sup>36</sup> Put differently, prophets emerged as part of a larger tradition. Prophetic behavior, concludes Wilson, must “take into account the role of social groups in creating prophets and in shaping their behavior.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, “[o]n the basis of the comparative evidence, we may expect Israelite society to have been involved in every phase of prophetic activity, from the prophet’s ‘call’ to the delivery of his message.”<sup>38</sup> Prophetic witness is a communal project, not an individualized responsibility.

### *Expanded Description of the Thesis*

The KD challenged the South African church to embody “Prophetic Theology” which would confront the oppressive structures and practices of the apartheid government. Not only did it try to articulate a “Prophetic Theology” but the manner in which it emerged was an example of a longer prophetic tradition. This prophetic tradition actively challenged the social structure introduced and enforced by the colonial powers along with the theological foundation that supported such structures. Such a prophetic tradition embodied an alternative politics in the midst of the dominant segregating practices in the South African context, which was most evident during apartheid’s rule.

With the demise of the apartheid government in 1994, the need for the church to embody such an alternative politics seemed unnecessary. The focus shifted from “being prophetic”, which was depicted as an antagonistic form of theology, to

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<sup>34</sup> Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1980), 3.

<sup>35</sup> Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, x.

<sup>37</sup> Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, 87.

<sup>38</sup> Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, 86.

reconstruction and cooperative engagement with the new democratic state. The assumption was that the post-apartheid government now represented the whole of South Africa rather than a small minority. Thus, the need to confront the state was no longer required as everyone now officially had a say in the politics of the country. The church, therefore, embraced a more cooperative stance – indeed partnership – with the new democratically elected state. Even those who were considered as leaders within the “prophetic” movement entered the corridors of the state itself. The need for a prophetic witness seemingly was no longer required.

This thesis will argue that it has become apparent that Prophetic Theology failed to recognize that it was prophetic not only because of what it said, but because of the way it gave witness to an alternative communal politics. In this way Prophetic Theology detached itself from the longstanding Constantinian synthesis that has governed the church’s relationship with the state since the fourth century. The Constantinian synthesis, or Constantinianism, has historically described the intimate relationship between the church and state. This synthesis assumes that the church’s own political agenda, grounded on the politics of Jesus, is co-opted as a “partner” in the state’s agenda. Christendom is a longstanding historical example that has become almost synonymous with Constantinianism. Thus, the shift that took place in South Africa, whereby even the prophetic church entered into a close relationship with the state after 1994 was to once again succumb to the Constantinian temptation, causing Prophetic Theology to become silent.

In order to better understand this assertion, this study will demonstrate that, although the KD was itself an example of Prophetic Theology, its articulation of “Prophetic Theology” proved to be anemic in several ways. First, it lacked eschatological depth. That which was depicted as “Prophetic Theology” portrayed the immediate struggle against the apartheid government as *the* emancipatory struggle that would deliver liberation, freedom, peace, and prosperity. The end of apartheid was portrayed as the *eschaton*.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, while God’s kingdom has perhaps come closer with the demise of the apartheid government, it did not fully arrive in 1994.<sup>40</sup> Challenges, injustice, oppression, and violence persist in the new democratic

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. pg. 215-16. See also Albert Nolan, *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel* (Cape Town & Grand Rapids, Michigan: D. Philip & W.B. Eerdmans, 1988), 189.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. pg. 211-12 which looks more closely at the idealistic portrayal of “the struggle” and its relation to Karl Mannheim’s work regarding ideology and utopia.

political dispensation, shattering the utopian portrayal embraced during the struggle against apartheid. The eschatological vision of “Prophetic Theology,” therefore, did not provide the eschatological depth needed to maintain the struggle – a struggle that continues until the arrival of God’s kingdom fully revealed.

Second, although the KD challenged the church to confront the apartheid government, its articulated “Prophetic Theology” maintained an overly optimistic view regarding the state and its form of power. Whereas those who participated in the struggle against apartheid understood themselves to be agents and possessors of power as demonstrated through the rally cry “Amandla awethu!” (“the power is ours!”), power after 1994 has been handed over to the state as its supposed rightful heir in the new democratic dispensation. The state has become the entity that has political power and therefore holds primary responsibility for setting the parameters by which people can relate in society. The people have released their power and handed it over to the state. Not surprisingly this new reality has become largely disempowering for the people. The struggle cry of “Amandla awethu” has in essence been usurped with a new reality: “Amandla awabo” (“the power is theirs”). The empowering, egalitarian, “grass roots” embodiment of power that mobilized communities in the struggle against apartheid shifted to a disempowering and determined form of power whereby the (new) state rules over its people. This has largely been accepted as a necessary component of liberal democracy. Even those who desire to reclaim “Prophetic Theology” in the post-apartheid context continue to be hampered by the assumption that the state is the entity responsible for the way in which people relate.

Third, although the KD emerged as an expression of a Prophetic Theology as it embodied an alternative political reality in the midst of the oppressive politics of the apartheid regime, its attempt to *articulate* a “Prophetic Theology” provided an under-rated comprehension of the nature of the church as an alternative political reality in the midst of empire. Put simply, the articulated “Prophetic Theology” did not identify its “alternative politicalness” as a necessary aspect in its being prophetic. It still maintained that “politics” was a necessary task of the state. Thus a distinction

emerged between that which was truly Prophetic Theology from that which was described as “Prophetic Theology”.<sup>41</sup>

In summary, this study suggests that a shift took place from pre-1994 to post-1994, from apartheid to post-apartheid, whereby the alternative political witness Prophetic Theology offered pre-1994 changed to relying on the state after 1994 as *the* political body. It was a shift whereby the state became *the* truly public space.<sup>42</sup> The result being that the post-apartheid church and its theology have largely come to accept, what the KD depicted as, a State or Church Theology in relation to the new political dispensation.<sup>43</sup> The church has reduced its agenda to being a spiritual chaplain and a pastoral presence, while handing the responsibility of politics into the hands of the state. This division of labour reflects again the assumptions of the Christendom synthesis of church and state. William Cavanaugh describes this as the modern myth of “politics” which assumes a supposed distinction between that which is “religious” from that which is “secular”.<sup>44</sup> Either way, the church has released its ability to be prophetic precisely because it has released its ability to provide an alternative political witness. As such, the church and its Prophetic Theology have become invisible.

This study proposes that Anabaptism provides some helpful perspectives for reclaiming and re-embodying Prophetic Theology in the South African context. First of all, Anabaptism, a faith movement that emerged in 1525 as part of the Radical Reformation, embraces and is led by a deeper eschatological vision. It is led by a vision of God’s kingdom present on earth. This determines the path of those who seek to follow Jesus – i.e., the path of the church. Thus, rather than focusing on the immediate struggle for liberation and portraying that as the *eschaton*, Anabaptism recognizes the need for the ongoing struggle towards true emancipation that would be part of God’s kingdom. The church is called to the current and ongoing struggle of being able to live in right relationships with one another, with creation, and with God.

Second, Anabaptism, like Prophetic Theology, possesses and seeks to embody an alternative understanding of power. Power, at its most basic level, means having

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<sup>41</sup> This is a distinction that I have attempted to offer consistently throughout the whole study. That which is not a true expression of prophetic theology is depicted as “Prophetic Theology.”

<sup>42</sup> See Cavanaugh, “Discerning,” 204.

<sup>43</sup> An assertion that Gerald West also makes. See Gerald West, “Kairos 2000: Moving Beyond Church Theology,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 108 (2000).

<sup>44</sup> See Cavanaugh’s chapter “Discerning”.

the ability to cause something to happen. The tendency has been to try to find the most effective means in causing the desired effect. Power, therefore, is largely understood as having the ability to influence and determine others – i.e., having power over others or having the power to rule. The state, therefore, ultimately becomes the entity that has power. Anabaptism, however, due to its strong emphasis on discipleship, along with its suspicion towards the state, does not assume that the state is the only entity that possesses power; it is not the only entity that can cause something, especially in the way people in society can and should relate. Anabaptists understand the church, led by Jesus' social vision, to be an entity – a political entity – that affects the world; and this is done not through force, violence, or ruling over others but through love, service, hospitality, and peace.

And lastly, this study suggests that ecclesiology from an Anabaptist perspective provides a focus on the visible example of a community that seeks to operate according to this deeper eschatological vision while embodying this different perception of power. In this way the church, a community of Jesus followers intent on participating in and witnessing to God's kingdom in the world, becomes an alternative community that provides a lived political example in the midst of a watching world.

Ultimately, the perspectives that Anabaptism offers are not foreign to Prophetic Theology. There is substantial similarity between prophetic or liberation theology and Anabaptism.<sup>45</sup> Anabaptism simply offers a theology and a theological tradition that can help reclaim and re-embody Prophetic Theology in South Africa's new political dispensation and its ongoing emancipatory struggle.

### *Structure of the study*

The KD provides a valuable entry point into the discussion regarding South Africa's political theology, both past and present, which is then put into conversation with Anabaptism. As such, this study begins by listening to the KD, its criticism, and its proposal. Chapter one will focus on its depiction of State Theology. Chapter two will focus on Church Theology. The focus in these two chapters will not be to analyze

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<sup>45</sup> LaVerne A. Rutschman, for example, describes both Anabaptism and liberation theology as liberating theologies. See LaVerne A. Rutschman, "Latin American Liberation Theology and Radical Anabaptism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 19, no. 1 (1982).

whether the KD's characterization of these two forms of theologies was accurate. That is to miss the point of the KD and its cry. Instead, our focus will be to understand how such a criticism and characterization could emerge. To do this we will look at the KD's criticism and then look historically to the way(s) in which the church has acted that could help us understand why the KD would lodge such criticisms.

Chapter three will then focus on the KD's proposed Prophetic Theology. We will then also look at historical examples of how such a characterization would emerge, demonstrating the larger theological movement throughout South Africa's history that could be depicted as a prophetic tradition. This will show how the emergence of the KD itself participates in this larger tradition.

Chapter four will then explore the theological landscape after 1994, after the official demise of the apartheid government. The primary interest will be to see how the theological landscape changed after 1994. We will be particularly interested to see what happened with Prophetic Theology.

Chapter five will offer an analysis regarding that which was depicted, both by the KD but also by several theologians, as "Prophetic Theology". Of particular interest in this chapter is the question why such a theology has not been sustained in the post-apartheid South African context.

Chapter six will then focus on Anabaptism and the perspective it offers to the larger conversation regarding South Africa's political theology in general, and Prophetic Theology in particular. As noted above, this chapter will suggest a few perspectives which Anabaptism offers that may help to reclaim and re-embody a Prophetic Theology in South Africa today. This chapter will then end with two contemporary examples of an embodied prophetic theology in South Africa today.

1.

## State Theology in South Africa

The Kairos Document (KD) highlighted and critiqued “State Theology” as one of the primary political theologies that provided the theological justification for apartheid ideology in South Africa. “State Theology blesses injustice, canonises the will of the powerful, and reduces the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy.”<sup>46</sup> State Theology not only justified apartheid and its unjust system, but also actively supported it. Churches and theologians, whom the KD argued were complicit in embodying State Theology, embraced the way in which the state structured society while providing the theological justification that supported such policies and practices. It was this relationship, one that justified the practices and policies of the apartheid regime, which the KD sought to critique.

This chapter will begin by exploring the KD’s characterization and critique of State Theology. We will then explore the historic relationship between the church and the state since the arrival of Christianity to South Africa. In doing so we will see how the KD’s critique targeted not only the churches that openly supported apartheid (e.g., the Dutch Reformed Church) but also the so-called English-speaking churches. This will allow us to better understand the KD’s concern regarding State Theology and how such a concern would emerge.

### *The Kairos Document’s Critique of State Theology*

The KD’s critique of State Theology focused on four key aspects: 1) the use of Romans 13:1-7 in giving absolute, “divine” authority to the state; 2) the use of “Law

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<sup>46</sup> "The Kairos Document," 9.

and Order” to determine and control what would be considered as just or unjust and thus permissible; 3) the use of the term “communist” to brand and denote anyone who criticized and rejected State Theology; and 4) the use made of the name of God.<sup>47</sup> Each of these elements were used to help justify and defend the policies and practices of the apartheid government. We will go through these different sections and outline the KD’s criticism towards each of these four elements.

### Romans 13:1-7

Romans 13:1-7 has long been used to defend the role of the state and civil government. Romans 13:1-7 is often invoked to argue that the state is established by God in order to repress evil and encourage good. As such, citizens are thus supposed to submit and obey the governing authorities as they seek to fulfill this divine mandate. The apartheid government, the KD noted, often appealed to Romans 13:1-7 both for justification for its actions as well as a call for South African citizens – who were expected to be Christian – and those in its territory (as those depicted as “non-white” were not officially considered as citizens of South Africa) to obey and support its policies, including those that enforced racial segregation and separation, which created and maintained an unequal society based on race. Apartheid’s use of Romans 13:1-7 made it a requirement for those who benefited from apartheid to support and defend its policies because of the state’s divinely ordained mandate.

The KD challenged this interpretation and understanding of Romans 13:1-7. First, it criticized the assumption that Paul, in this text, provides an absolute and definitive Christian doctrine about the state that is valid for all times.<sup>48</sup> Instead, the KD argued that every text must be interpreted in the context in which it was written. Not to do this is to make the intent and meaning of the text abstract.<sup>49</sup> The context in which Romans 13 was written, the KD argued, the Jews did not believe that their imperial overlords (i.e., the Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, or Romans) had some kind of divine right to rule over and oppress them. Although these empires ruled for a

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<sup>47</sup> "The Kairos Document," 9.

<sup>48</sup> "The Kairos Document," 9.

<sup>49</sup> "The Kairos Document," 10.



while, the Jews did not believe this is what God approved or desired.<sup>50</sup> Ultimately, God desired the freedom and liberation of Israel.<sup>51</sup> The text in Romans, the KD argued, has to be read in light of this broader context.

Secondly, when the context of Paul's letter is better understood, the KD highlighted the "antinomian" or "enthusiast" expressions of Christianity in Rome; expressions that suggested that Christians were exonerated from obeying any state at all because Jesus was their Lord and king.<sup>52</sup> Although the KD did not specify a reason, it argued that this "antinomian" understanding is heretical.<sup>53</sup> Paul, it suggested, speaks to the Christians in Rome, telling them that there will always be some form of state or governing authorities in power before Christ's return to which Christians will be subject. They will face some form of political authority. State Theology's use of this text, however, does not concern itself with this broader context to which Paul was writing. Rather, the Romans 13:1-7 text is "pressed into its service without respect for the context and the intention of Paul."<sup>54</sup>

## Law and Order

The KD's second point of contention against State Theology pertained to the way terms such as "law" and "order" were used in order to maintain the status quo of the apartheid created social order – a social order that actively oppressed the majority of those within South Africa. The "law," in other words, that the state sought to maintain was based on the discriminatory and unjust laws of apartheid. Likewise, the "order" it sought to maintain was "the organized and institutionalized disorder of oppression."<sup>55</sup> Although the KD recognized the state's duty to maintain law and order,

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<sup>50</sup> "The Kairos Document," 10.

<sup>51</sup> "The Kairos Document," 10.

<sup>52</sup> "The Kairos Document," 10.

<sup>53</sup> This does provide us with one of our first clues as to the dilemma Prophetic Theology encounters in post-apartheid South Africa. It also highlights the difference between it and Anabaptist theology which we will investigate further. At this point, we can simply note that there remains within the critique of State Theology in the KD an assumption that Christian theology has a role to play through the governing authorities as it structures society at large. Although the KD critiques the way the apartheid government misused the Romans 13:1-7 text, it suggests that we should not go to the extreme of denouncing the role the governing authorities can play in shaping a Christian society. We will come back to this. Cf. chapter six.

<sup>54</sup> "The Kairos Document," 11.

<sup>55</sup> "The Kairos Document," 11.

the state did not have the divine mandate to determine any kind of law and order. Something is not moral or just simply because the state deemed it as such.<sup>56</sup>

The KD argued that for the Christian the concern is for a just law and a right order. State Theology, it argued, tried to re-establish the status-quo of orderly discrimination, exploitation, and oppression whilst demanding an allegiance and obedience that is reserved for God alone.<sup>57</sup>

### The Threat of Communism

The third point of contention in the critique of State Theology in the KD pertained to “communism.” Anything that threatened the status quo of the apartheid created social order was often described as “communist.”<sup>58</sup> “Anyone who opposes the state and especially anyone who rejects its theology is simply dismissed as a ‘communist.’... The State uses the label ‘communist’ in an uncritical and unexamined way as its symbol of evil.”<sup>59</sup> State Theology, argued the KD, operates according to the myth that communism is godless and atheistic. This is perceived as problematic when the state portrays itself as Christian and therefore Godly. “All evil,” the KD suggested, “is communistic and a communist or socialist ideas are atheistic and godless.”<sup>60</sup>

Portraying “communists” and “communism” in this light frightens, the KD argued, some into blindly accepting any kind of domination and exploitation by a capitalist minority<sup>61</sup> that veils itself as the protectorate from the godless and atheist majority. The KD highlighted the irony that, because of the use of the “communist” label, millions of Christians in South Africa were regarded as “atheists”.<sup>62</sup> The apartheid state, in other words, would not recognize the Christianity of anyone who would challenge the apartheid regime and system. The KD, however, noted how “in

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<sup>56</sup> "The Kairos Document," 11.

<sup>57</sup> "The Kairos Document," 11.

<sup>58</sup> "The Kairos Document," 12.

<sup>59</sup> "The Kairos Document," 12.

<sup>60</sup> "The Kairos Document," 12.

<sup>61</sup> "The Kairos Document," 12.

<sup>62</sup> "The Kairos Document," 12.

earlier times when Christians rejected the gods of the Roman Empire they were branded as ‘atheists’ – by the State.”<sup>63</sup>

### The God of the State

The fourth and final critique the KD lodged against State Theology pertains to the apartheid state’s pledge of allegiance. The KD claimed that the god of the apartheid state, which was often referred to in its practices and its constitution, was an idol. This apartheid god has historically been on the side of the white settlers who dispossessed black people of their land and gave it to its “chosen people.”<sup>64</sup> “Here is a god who exalts the proud and humbles the poor – the very opposite of the God of the Bible who ‘scatters the proud of heart, pulls down the mighty from their thrones and exalts the humble’ (Luke 1:51-52).”<sup>65</sup>

The god of the South African apartheid state, it argued, is none other than the antichrist – the Devil.<sup>66</sup> The South African regime, it continued, is particularly abhorrent because it makes use of Christianity to justify its evil ways.<sup>67</sup> “‘State Theology’ is not only heretical; it is blasphemous.”<sup>68</sup> And the White Dutch Reformed Church in particular, the KD pointed out, subscribes to this heretical theology.<sup>69</sup>

### *“State Theology” in South Africa*

History of Christianity in South Africa has from the beginning been inextricably linked to colonialism. Christianity and the Christian church arrived in South Africa with the first settlers: the Dutch arriving in 1652, the French Huguenots

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<sup>63</sup> "The Kairos Document," 12.

<sup>64</sup> "The Kairos Document," 13.

<sup>65</sup> "The Kairos Document," 13.

<sup>66</sup> "The Kairos Document," 13.

<sup>67</sup> "The Kairos Document," 13.

<sup>68</sup> "The Kairos Document," 13.

<sup>69</sup> "The Kairos Document," 13.

in 1668 and German settlers a little while later.<sup>70</sup> The church arrived hand-in-hand with the colonial powers that would eventually take over the land.

From the very beginning of the church's arrival onto "the Cape colony", the church, which was predominantly Protestant,<sup>71</sup> assumed a mutual relationship with the colonial powers with whom they had come. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) became the established church in this new colony.<sup>72</sup> In keeping with its Calvinist heritage (although the extent of how strictly Calvinist the DRC is debated<sup>73</sup>), the DRC assumed a mutual relationship between the church and the state, a hallmark of the Reformed tradition since its inception in Zurich under Ulrich Zwingli and carried on in Geneva with John Calvin.

With the arrival of the "English-speaking churches" in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, this assumed relationship between the state and the church continued. However, these so-called "English-speaking churches" came hand-in-hand with a new colonial (or imperialist) power – the British. Although the DRC and the English-speaking churches largely found themselves on different sides toward the latter part of apartheid, they both shared the common Christendom assumption – the notion of a mutually agreed upon division of labour between church and state.

In order to understand what the KD described as "State Theology" during apartheid and post-apartheid, it is important to explore how the relationship between church and state emerged and became rooted within South Africa. This will help to identify some of the concerning traits that the KD highlighted, which still affect the church today and its self-understanding in post-apartheid South Africa.

## The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)

The Reformed church shared a mutual, cooperative relationship with the governing authorities. The emergence of the Reformed tradition itself resulted, as

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<sup>70</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 1.

<sup>71</sup> As the Dutch East India Company forbade the practice of Roman Catholicism (de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 1).

<sup>72</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 1.

<sup>73</sup> See for example David Bosch, "The Afrikaner and South Africa," *Theology Today* 43, no. 2 (1986); Willem Nicol, *Godsdiens Wat Werk* (Wellington, South Africa: Lux Verbi, 2000); and Vincent Brummer, *Vroom of Regsinnig? Teologie in Die Ng Kerk* (Wellington, South Africa: Bybel-Media, 2015).

some have described, from a “Magisterial Reformation” – the reformation of the church through the magistrate. The governing authorities in Zurich and Geneva played an integral role in the reformation of the church in those areas. In order to better understand the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa, especially regarding church – state relations, it is important to review the theological roots of the DRC which emerged from the birth of the Reformed tradition.

Justo González argues that Ulrich Zwingli’s pursuit in reforming the church was led primarily by patriotic considerations.<sup>74</sup> Because of his growing concern over the practice of mercenary service, a practice that was widely accepted in the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which Zwingli supported and from which he benefited earlier in his life, Zwingli kept his patriotic concerns and the reformation of the church closely connected.<sup>75</sup> “...Zwingli’s reform movement always had nationalistic and political overtones. This can be seen in his insistence that the law of the gospel is not only for individual Christians but that states also are expected to obey it.”<sup>76</sup> The eternal law of God, argued Zwingli, is revealed in three forms: in moral commandments, in ceremonial laws, and in civil laws. According to Zwingli, ceremonial laws, granted before Christ, were practices that led towards righteousness. Moral laws are found both in the Old Testament, which expresses the eternal will of God, and in the New Testament where they are summarized in the commandment of love. Civil laws pertain to particular human situations as they lead towards righteousness, thus fulfilling the eternal will of God through love. “Therefore those who serve Christ are bound to the law of love, which is the same as the moral law of the Old Testament and the natural law inscribed in all hearts.”<sup>77</sup> Law and gospel are therefore, in essence, the same. “The will of God is always the same, and it has been revealed in the law. The function of the gospel, then, is to liberate us from the consequences of our having broken the law and to enable us to obey it.”<sup>78</sup>

Zwingli’s portrayal of the relationship between church and state was thus closer than that of Martin Luther. According to Zwingli, even though Christian law is

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<sup>74</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought: Volume III: From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1975), 64.

<sup>75</sup> Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 64.

<sup>76</sup> Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 64.

<sup>77</sup> Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 70.

<sup>78</sup> Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 71.

higher than civil law, they both point to the one divine will.<sup>79</sup> One can here see the medieval influence of the *corpus christianum* whereby the *respublica christiana* and the *ecclesia* are understood as virtually synonymous.<sup>80</sup> Zwingli built upon Aquinas' understanding that the best governments were those that submitted themselves to the governance of the eternal King—Jesus Christ.<sup>81</sup> “Thus, even those who are not among the elect, and who therefore do not follow the evangelical law, are subject to the law of God as it is manifested in the rulers and the civil law.”<sup>82</sup>

John Calvin, largely continuing where Zwingli left off, provided what became Reformed theology's characteristic shape. Like Zwingli, Calvin also understood “law” differently than Luther. Whereas for Luther there was a dialectical relationship between law and gospel, Calvin, similar to Zwingli, saw the relationship between the two as primarily continuous.<sup>83</sup> Beginning with “law” as understood as the revelation of God to ancient Israel—the “books of Moses” as well as the Hebrew Scriptures, Jesus Christ proved to be the culmination of what was previously revealed as “law”.<sup>84</sup> “This is of fundamental importance, for the knowledge of God's will would be useless without the grace of Christ. The ceremonial law had Christ as its content and end, for without him all ceremonies are void. The only reason why the sacrifices of the ancient priests were acceptable unto God was the promised redemption in Jesus Christ.”<sup>85</sup> The essential content found within both testaments is thus the same—Jesus Christ.

For Calvin there were three purposes for “law.” The first is to show us our sin, misery, and depravity. When we are able to recognize what is required of us by God's law, we are able to see our shortcomings, thus highlighting the grace required from God.<sup>86</sup> The second is to restrain the wicked, which, although it may not, itself, lead to regeneration, is necessary for social order.<sup>87</sup> The third is to reveal the will of God to those who believe. Here we find the moral law which, for those who recognize and believe in God, is expected of us. “Calvin's basic contention is that Christ has abolished the curse of the law but not its validity.... In truth, the law cannot be

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<sup>79</sup> Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 73.

<sup>80</sup> W. A. Dreyer, “Calvin on Church and Government,” *In die Skriflig* 44, no. 3 (2010): 169.

<sup>81</sup> Dreyer, “Calvin on Church and Government,” 169.

<sup>82</sup> Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 73.

<sup>83</sup> Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 133.

<sup>84</sup> Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 133.

<sup>85</sup> Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 133.

<sup>86</sup> Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 133.

<sup>87</sup> Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 133.

abolished, for it expresses the will of God, which never changes.”<sup>88</sup> Thus, instead of Luther’s more dialectical approach between law and gospel, Calvin’s main thrust with regards to the relationship between law and gospel is one of promise and fulfillment.<sup>89</sup>

Calvin’s understanding regarding the relationship between law and gospel becomes more apparent in the relationship between church and state. Although in theory there are, according to Calvin, different jurisdictions between church and state, the former “spiritual” and the latter “temporal,” the two are viewed as created by God therefore fulfilling specific functions that serve God’s will and divine justice.<sup>90</sup> The spiritual is concerned in instructing piety and reverence toward God, whereas the temporal is political, “whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men.”<sup>91</sup> The two are seen as a *corpus permixtum*—intermingled as they work together in serving and fulfilling God’s will revealed in each jurisdiction respectively.<sup>92</sup>

The Reformed tradition’s birth during the Reformation highlights certain assumptions in how the church and state are to function and relate together. Understanding these basic assumptions helps to better understand the theological foundation of the early settlers upon their arrival to the Cape and the way in which the colonial power and its first established church, the DRC, were to relate.

As with any ecclesial tradition, as time went on the newly established church continued to be fed from its historical tradition while also influenced through its interaction with its new context and surroundings. Although the DRC in the Cape gained its autonomy from its mother church in Holland in 1824,<sup>93</sup> the shift that was taking place in Holland of shedding some of its strict Calvinist theology, due, in large part, to the impact of the Enlightenment,<sup>94</sup> affected the DRC. Thus John de Gruchy notes that the theology of the DRC in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not pure Calvinism.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 134.

<sup>89</sup> Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 135.

<sup>90</sup> Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 157-58.

<sup>91</sup> Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 157.

<sup>92</sup> Dreyer, “Calvin on Church and Government,” 170.

<sup>93</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 3.

<sup>94</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 3.

<sup>95</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 4. See also Johann Kinghorn, “The Theology of Separate Equality: A Critical Outline of the Drc’s Position on Apartheid,” in *Christianity in South Africa*, ed. Martin Prozesky (Bergville, South Africa: Southern Book Publishers (pty) Ltd, 1990), 58.

This shift was also taking place in a time whereby the British had become the new colonial power; and the British wanted to distance those within its new colony to its previous “mother land.” The new British authorities were thus suspicious of those who had been educated in Holland. Rather than continuing to provide Dutch ministers, they sought ministers that would feed a new ecclesial expression which would shape citizens towards a more British identity. Toward this end, a number of Scottish Presbyterian ministers were sought who were acceptable to the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK)<sup>96</sup> as they also were part of the Reformed tradition, but whose citizenship was more acceptable to the British government.<sup>97</sup> Of significance for the DRC was the arrival of a new evangelical enthusiasm through the influence of Andrew Murray Jr. and his brother John; descendants of Andrew Murray who arrived in the Cape colony in 1822. They injected a new evangelical enthusiasm into the church, profoundly shaping Dutch Reformed theology and piety.<sup>98</sup> Although their evangelical piety did not particularly fit pure Calvinism, it proved not to matter much as the DRC, though conservative, was not strictly Calvinist.<sup>99</sup>

Although the DRC was inevitably shaped and influenced through its contextual realities, the one element that remained from its Reformed, Calvinist foundation was the cooperative relationship between the church and the state also known as Christendom. Both the church and the state assumed this relationship from the very beginning. This was not a new phenomenon. “For most of its two-thousand years of history the Christian Church has existed within political systems which have been hierarchical and authoritarian. The dominant established churches have generally supported such government and mirrored it in their own life and structures.”<sup>100</sup> The church in South Africa, rooted in this Christendom imagination, assumed that its primary function was to meet the spiritual needs of the colonial settlers and administrators that had settled in South Africa. It assumed a “spiritual” role, whereas the state tended to the “material” and “political” issues among the settlers in the new

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<sup>96</sup> The Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) is the oldest and largest church within the Dutch Reformed family of churches. Several other church bodies have split from it including the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHK) and the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (GK).

<sup>97</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 4.

<sup>98</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 4.

<sup>99</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 4-5.

<sup>100</sup> John de Gruchy, “The Church and the Struggle for a Democratic South Africa,” in *Christianity in South Africa*, ed. Martin Prozesky (Bergville, South Africa: Southern Book Publishers [Pty] Ltd, 1990), 220.



land. It was this relationship, the assumed cooperation based on an established division of labour between church and state, that existed from the arrival of the early settlers throughout the life, being and function of the church in South Africa since then.

In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century the relationship between the church and state in South Africa became even more intimate due in large part to an increase in Afrikaner nationalism. The Afrikaner vision, notes John de Gruchy, was an “eschatological vision which anticipated once again the rebirth of a republic in which the Afrikaner would be the free and undisputed ruler under the providence of the Almighty.”<sup>101</sup> The Afrikaners, a group of people of Dutch decent going back to the earliest of settlers, had throughout their history since their arrival to Africa, found within their trials in their now homeland a “holy history” that vividly portrayed Old Testament motifs which compared them with the Hebrew and Israelite people.<sup>102</sup> Although this was not official Dutch Reformed theology, it certainly was fundamental to Afrikaner self-understanding and identity.<sup>103</sup> The Afrikaners “detected a sacred thread running through all of their events in the past, beginning with the Great Trek into the unknown (the exodus) and including the encounter with and victory over the black nations (Philistines), especially at the Battle of Blood River, where they entered into a sacred covenant with God, the entry into the promised land of the Transvaal and Orange Free State, and the encounter with the pursuing British.”<sup>104</sup> The church played a central role in providing such an interpretation of history fed by their eschatological vision, and by fueling a sense of identity based on a hermeneutical and theological base upon which nationalism could flourish.<sup>105</sup> Ernie Regehr summarizes their understanding whereby “[a]s a *people*, God had sent them to bring true Reformed Christianity to Africa, and for them to perform this calling it was necessary that they remain as a *people*. They were elected as a people to do his

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<sup>101</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 30.

<sup>102</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 29.

<sup>103</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 29. See also Bosch, "The Afrikaner and South Africa."

<sup>104</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 30.

<sup>105</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 30. Again, see Bosch, "The Afrikaner and South Africa."

bidding and Afrikaner nationalism, by virtue of that election, was essential to the fulfillment of his will.”<sup>106</sup>

The result, therefore, was a form of civil religion “based on a doctrine of creation, history, culture, and calling, designed to uphold the Afrikaner people in their struggle for identity, survival, and power, against all odds.”<sup>107</sup> The concept of “separate development”, therefore, was not a far stretch given this foundation. In fact, it was viewed as the will of God.<sup>108</sup> The seeds of apartheid, thus, were already sown in the fertile soil of Afrikaner nationalism which the DRC fed and justified theologically. W. A. de Klerk noted: “Afrikaner politics was slowly but fatally being theologized. There was a growing urge to set the South African world aright, once and for all, to reconstruct it and redeem it in terms of a newly-defined Afrikaner ‘lewens-enwereldbeskouing’ – a world view.”<sup>109</sup>

As is apparent, the church and the state were understood to be participating within the same project, from the arrival of the first Europeans to the pursuit of bringing about an Afrikaner republic – an Afrikanerdom. Apartheid turned out to be the fruit produced from the tree whose roots were anchored in the soil of Christendom.

### The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) during apartheid

As noted above, the seed of apartheid had already been planted long before the National Party assumed political office in 1948. The ongoing pursuit of separation between those of European descent from those who were considered as “native” was the defining characteristic of the relationship between the different races since the arrival of the settlers.

Within the DRC, several key moments in its history marked its future trajectory. For example, when the DRC was first established, it did not distinguish who could and who could not be members. The church was for all those who

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<sup>106</sup> Ernie Regehr, *Perceptions of Apartheid: The Churches and Political Change in South Africa* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1979), 147.

<sup>107</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 31.

<sup>108</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 32.

<sup>109</sup> W. A. de Klerk, *The Puritans in Africa: A History of Afrikanerdom* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), 199.

considered themselves to be Christian. Race was, officially, ignored.<sup>110</sup> Practically, however, there was a growing dissatisfaction in having black and white worshipping together in one church. The notion of *gelykstelling*, the notion of equality among believers despite one's race, proved to be uncomfortable. Evangelization and conversion of "the heathen" were complicated issues in the Dutch Reformed Church. Members of the DRC believed that they were obliged to convert and evangelize "the heathen". But this begged the question whether these new converts would become equal to their new Christian brothers and sisters. This would, of course, challenge the assumed superiority of the white, colonists of European descent, whose civil rights were seen to derive from their status as Christians.<sup>111</sup> The response was that although a spiritual *gelykstelling* may have come into being in the eyes of God, it would not mean a social *gelykstelling* among believers. Thus, a growing faction began to emerge in favour of separation within the church.<sup>112</sup>

In 1857, the General Synod of the DRC officially decided that the church would separate along racial lines. They proclaimed:

The Synod considers it desirable and according to the Holy Scripture that our heathen members be accepted and initiated into our congregations wherever it is possible; but where this measure, as a result of the weakness of some, would stand in the way of promoting the work of Christ among the heathen people, then congregations set up among the heathen, or still to be set up, should enjoy their Christian privileges in a separate building or institution.<sup>113</sup>

Two years later the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa was established for black congregations, which emerged from the increased mission work of the DRC. In 1881, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church emerged for coloured members.

Although such separation was not desired in principle, the result was that it provided the first official and doctrinal defense to the already common practice of racial separation in the church. The ongoing fear of racial mixture among the Afrikaners, which was understood as the first step towards the loss of identity and

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<sup>110</sup> See Kinghorn, "The Theology of Separate Equality," 58.

<sup>111</sup> Richard Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2012), 42.

<sup>112</sup> Kinghorn, "The Theology of Separate Equality," 58.

<sup>113</sup> Chris Loff, "The History of a Heresy," in *Apartheid Is a Heresy*, ed. John de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 19. Note the irony where, even though the statement acknowledges the evangelism of some of "the heathen," they continue to refer to "our heathen members." Thus, even conversion into Christianity does not remove one's depiction as "heathen."

culture, continued, and perhaps increasingly fed, the assumption of white superiority—an assumption that emerged from their perspectives on creation and nature: “...racially defined nationalism teaches that humanity is *genetically* divided into inferior and superior groups.”<sup>114</sup> White superiority became considered as a fact of nature. The writings of Rev. P. J. S. de Klerk in 1939 provides a good example:

Equalisation leads to the humiliation of both races. Mixed marriages between higher civilized Christianized nations and lower nations militate against the Word of God... This is nothing less than a crime, particularly when we take note of the very clear lines of division between the races in our country. The Voortrekkers constantly guarded against such admixture and because of their deed of faith the [Afrikaner] nation was conserved as a pure Christian race up to this day.<sup>115</sup>

Similarly, this mentality is clearly articulated in the *Handelinge van die Federale Raad* in 1935:

The traditional fear among the Afrikaner of “equalization” of black and white stems from his abhorrence of the idea of racial admixture and anything that may lead to it. On the other hand, the Church does not deny the native and the coloured a social status as honourable as they may be able to achieve. Each nation has the right to be itself and to attempt to develop and uplift itself. Thus, while the Church rejects social equality in the sense that the differences between races are negated in the normal run of things, the Church would like to promote social differentiation and spiritual or cultural segregation.<sup>116</sup>

As one can see, the practices of segregation that were commonplace began to be justified theologically, in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leading towards doctrinal statements that would continue to steer the DRC further in that direction in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All of which led towards the theological justification of apartheid.

At first the church’s support for apartheid was based almost wholly on the concept of tradition.<sup>117</sup> But, after the National Party came into power in 1948, implementing its comprehensive policy of racial segregation, the DRC found ways of justifying apartheid and its *racial* segregation scripturally. Two documents were significant in defending apartheid scripturally, one written in 1948 and the other in

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<sup>114</sup> Kinghorn, "The Theology of Separate Equality," 62.

<sup>115</sup> Rev. P. J. S. de Klerk in *Rassebakens* as quoted in Kinghorn, "The Theology of Separate Equality," 62.

<sup>116</sup> *Handelinge van die Federale Raad*, 1935, 99.

<sup>117</sup> Kinghorn, "The Theology of Separate Equality," 63.

1950. These documents were the first steps towards the DRC's theological construct that justified apartheid. This justification was built around the following principles.

1) *All are equal because of separation*

One of the fundamental arguments developed in defense of apartheid, or “separate development” as H. F. Verwoerd would later describe it, was the notion that humanity was in fact created equal, but within the confines of particular nationhoods.<sup>118</sup> “All nations were... equal – at least in principle, if not at the level of their cultural development. Exactly for this reason a God-given responsibility rested on the more developed to ensure the development of the less developed – without violating individuality and dignity.”<sup>119</sup> “Nation” came to replace “race.” The South African problem, therefore, was not one of race but a problem in how different nations were to relate with one another. “In the twinkling of an eye South Africa was transformed from a multiracial to a multinational country.”<sup>120</sup> For this reason, notes Kinghorn, the DRC failed to feel guilty in response to the many complaints and allegations of racism. The DRC understood itself as opposing racism, which they clearly described, in 1986, as a “grievous sin.”<sup>121</sup> Racism, in other words, was never equated with apartheid because of the notion of “nations” and “separate development” among nations. Indeed, apartheid was built on the dream, as Kinghorn notes, of nations affirming “separate freedoms,” equal development and the affirmation of human dignity because of their differences.<sup>122</sup> This dream, however, proved to be just that – a dream that was painfully oblivious to reality. It ignored the way the social structure of apartheid oppressed those declared to be “non-white” who were then thought of and treated as inferior.

The DRC perceived this concept of “equality via separation” as the key point of the tower of Babel narrative (Gen. 11: 1-9). Although the defense of apartheid begins from the stated belief in the “unity of humanity,”<sup>123</sup> it consistently builds on

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<sup>118</sup> Kinghorn, “The Theology of Separate Equality,” 66.

<sup>119</sup> Kinghorn, “The Theology of Separate Equality,” 66.

<sup>120</sup> Amry Vandenbosch, “To Fashion a Land: South African Whites and Racial Policy Justification,” *The Reformed Journal* 23, no. 9 November (1973): 15.

<sup>121</sup> Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika, *Church and Society: A Testimony Approved by the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1986* (Bloemfontein: General Synodical Commission, 1987), 20.

<sup>122</sup> Kinghorn, “The Theology of Separate Equality,” 68.

<sup>123</sup> Kinghorn, “The Theology of Separate Equality,” 75.

the ways in which God is and/or has brought about difference within the world. Belief in the triune God, for example, demonstrates the unity of God which does not negate the diversity in God's creation or in the Godhead itself.<sup>124</sup> Likewise, the story of Babel serves to demonstrate the plurality of God's creation, creating and blessing diverse nations.<sup>125</sup>

## 2) *Harmonious Balance*

The second principle often used as theological defense for apartheid was the belief that humanity is made up of a constellation of different entities which delicately counterbalance one another. If this balance is done well, then harmony can be achieved. Thus, the primary emphasis of both the DRC and the government was to influence proper, correct, and "natural" relationships to form within these different entities. Integration, therefore, was seen as disturbing the "proper" diversity.<sup>126</sup> Those who struggled for justice against apartheid were viewed as troublemakers because they "disturbed the peace" – the intricate and delicate balance necessary for harmony and, what the apartheid government and the DRC described as, peace.<sup>127</sup>

## 3) *Intrinsic collectivism*

This assumption in what was deemed as "natural" supported the importance placed on maintaining the distinction between cultural groups. These cultural groups, it was argued, were distinct because of their corporate sense of identity, language, faith, and so forth. Blacks and whites, it was therefore assumed, were of different cultures, highlighting the need for such cultures to remain distinct and thus separate.

There were several problems, however, with this argument. First, there existed other examples of nations that were comprised of different cultures. For example there were where German-, French-, and Italian-speaking Swiss. Furthermore, there were different cultures among South Africa's "whites." There were (are), for example, Afrikaners, English-speaking South Africans, Jews, and so forth, all of which

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<sup>124</sup> Kinghorn, "The Theology of Separate Equality," 76.

<sup>125</sup> Kinghorn, "The Theology of Separate Equality," 76.

<sup>126</sup> Kinghorn, "The Theology of Separate Equality," 77.

<sup>127</sup> More will be said about this particular understanding of peace, along with the justifications for and critiques against this particular understanding as we explore the KD's critique of "Church Theology".

assumed different faith convictions, language, and sense of identity.<sup>128</sup> The argument based on “intrinsic collectivism” proved to be a thinly veiled justification of racism.

### The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and its relationship to the state

Given what we have seen thus far, namely the theological justification for apartheid and its policies, what was the explicit relationship between the DRC and the apartheid government? Was the KD’s charge against the White Dutch Reformed Churches of “State Theology” accurate?

As can be seen above, one of the main roles of the DRC during apartheid was the theological support and justification it provided for the state as it developed and implemented its different policies of segregation and separation, thus continuing the expansion of white privilege while oppressing the vast majority in South Africa. Yet, many have argued that the characterization of the DRC as a “state church” or as subscribing to “state theology”, as the KD alleges, is not accurate. It is argued that the two, the church and the state, were and remained different.

There is an element of this argument that is accurate. Although, as noted above, the DRC and the state assumed a Christendom based relationship, the DRC did differentiate between the state and the church; specifically between the church and politics. It assumed that the church was not called to get involved in politics and “political affairs.”<sup>129</sup> And so, like the semantic move we noted earlier whereby it was possible for the DRC to deny its involvement in racism or racist policies because the distinction was not based on race but rather on “nations”, the DRC likewise did not see itself as a “state church” because, as a church, it was not involved in politics.

Johann Kinghorn provides an excellent summary in how the DRC supported apartheid through its “theology of separate equality”.<sup>130</sup> Interestingly, however, Kinghorn concludes by stating that the DRC saw itself *not* as a state church because “the direct influence of the DRC was never as significant as it is purported to be. Not being a state church,” argues Kinghorn, “and structured in a non-hierarchical way, it

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<sup>128</sup> Vandenbosch, “To Fashion a Land,” 15.

<sup>129</sup> Thus the major criticism against the South African Council of Churches during the struggle against apartheid – it was too political.

<sup>130</sup> See Kinghorn, “The Theology of Separate Equality.”

is extremely difficult for the DRC to act as a single-minded pressure group in society.”<sup>131</sup> What the DRC can and should be criticized for, he continues, is not being involved enough.<sup>132</sup> The church, he argues, did not sufficiently monitor the political use that was made of its “principles” and theology.<sup>133</sup>

Yet, the state regularly assumed it was operating as a Christian nation based on Christian principles.<sup>134</sup> What’s more, the state saw itself participating in the same project, which, as John de Gruchy notes, sought a republic in which the Afrikaner would be the free and undisputed ruler under the providence of the Almighty.<sup>135</sup> And so, given this reality, the church did not need to put on the “political cloak” as their collaborator, the National Party, already had that in hand and under control. Indeed, this helps to demonstrate the thin understanding in the way “politics” or “being political” has been understood. The argument and understanding within the DRC, which is made apparent in its attempts to distance itself from the apartheid government, assumes that “political” means being in the corridors of state power—providing national legislation and laws, creating policies that enforce such legislation and laws, and so forth. Thus, because the DRC did not see itself as officially drafting and creating such legislation or laws, its self-identity as a church was apolitical. Historically, however, we can see how the church—the DRC—and the state—the National Party—worked hand-in-hand. The one making legislation and laws and then putting them into practice as it constructed a society pursuing “separate development” among “nations”; the other providing the theological justification for this development along with the spiritual support required by a society constructing an eschatological vision based on Afrikaner nationalism.

### The English-speaking churches in South Africa

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<sup>131</sup> Kinghorn, "The Theology of Separate Equality," 78.

<sup>132</sup> Kinghorn, "The Theology of Separate Equality," 79.

<sup>133</sup> Kinghorn, "The Theology of Separate Equality," 79.

<sup>134</sup> Thus Allan Boesak’s comment: “Apartheid is unique. But its uniqueness does not lie in the inherent violence of the system, nor in the inevitable brutality without which it cannot survive, nor in its dehumanization of and contempt for black personhood, nor even in the tragic alienation it fosters between people. The uniqueness of apartheid lies in its claim to be based on Christian principles. It is being justified on the basis of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the name of the Liberator God and his Son Jesus Christ, apartheid is being perpetuated—and it is Reformed people who are doing that.” Allan Boesak, "Black and Reformed: Burden or Challenge?," *The Reformed Journal* 31, no. 11 November-December (1981): 13-14.

<sup>135</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 30.



Because of the close relationship between the DRC and the apartheid government, it can be easy to point an accusatory finger at the DRC for allowing and perpetuating apartheid and its systemic embodiment of racial discrimination, injustice, and oppression. History, however, is much more nuanced. The story of the English-speaking churches (Anglican, Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian) in South Africa is a difficult one to narrate as there are subtleties and nuances that can easily get glossed over in one way or another. To begin with, the description “English-speaking churches” is problematic as membership among these churches has largely been non-white, at least in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present. The primary language now used in these churches is no longer English. John de Gruchy, for example, argues that the description of “English-speaking churches” has become a misnomer; it has lost much of its historic specificity.<sup>136</sup> The phrase “English-speaking churches” is better understood, he argues, as an ethnic description that refers to a particular point in time, rather than a theological or ecclesiastical description.<sup>137</sup>

The tale of the so-called “English-speaking churches” is filled with paradox. On the one hand, the English-speaking churches were ecumenically engaged, especially in the South African Council of Churches (SACC), which was a leading body in the struggle against apartheid. Yet, the roots of the English-speaking churches are not detached from the same colonialism and white superiority noted earlier. In fact, although much focus and blame has been placed on the DRC for its attempts to justify apartheid theologically, there is a long history of colonialism and racial segregation practice within the English-speaking churches as well.<sup>138</sup> It is tempting to point the finger solely at the DRC as the culpable party for the development and justification of apartheid. And, because of the prominent role many of the leaders of the so-called English-speaking churches played during the struggle against apartheid, it is tempting to depict the English-speaking churches as the heroes of the struggle. And yet, it cannot be said that the English-speaking churches were innocent with regards to both the development and sustaining of apartheid. Indeed, although many

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<sup>136</sup> John de Gruchy, “The Chastening of the English-Speaking Churches in South Africa,” in *Race and Reconciliation in South Africa*, ed. William E. Van Vugt and G. Daan Cloete (Lanham, Maryland & Oxford, England: Lexington Books, 2000), 38.

<sup>137</sup> de Gruchy, “The Chastening of the English-Speaking Churches in South Africa,” 39.

<sup>138</sup> In fact, the British were the ones that introduced Pass Laws in 1809 (Regehr, *Perceptions of Apartheid*, 119).

of the leaders of English-speaking churches were tirelessly committed to the struggle against apartheid, members, especially white members, of their churches did not always share that same commitment.<sup>139</sup> “All the English-speaking member churches were unanimous in formally rejecting apartheid and opposing much of its legislation. But much of this was more a matter of pronouncement than of action.”<sup>140</sup> This paradox highlights the fact that the church itself was a site of struggle.

Although the English-speaking churches became known as “the churches in opposition” during apartheid (churches in opposition to the apartheid government), they did not oppose the roles or relationship between church and state as such. Rather they opposed the theological justification of racial superiority and the use of the authority and power of the state which enforced such racial bias. One can see a hint of this shared assumption regarding the relationship between the church and the state in the revised version (1986) of the KD.<sup>141</sup>

#### English-speaking churches pre-apartheid

By the time the British arrived to the Cape Colony in the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, society was already largely segregated amongst racial lines. This becomes apparent as we read Cecil Rhodes’ comment on “the native question” during his campaign for election to the Cape assembly in 1887:

I will lay down my own policy in this native question. Either you have to receive them on an equal footing as citizens or to call them a subject race. I have made up my mind that there must be class legislation, that there must be Pass Laws and Peace Preservation Acts, and that we have to treat natives where they are in a state of barbarism, in a different way to ourselves. We are to be lords over them.... The native is to be treated as a child and denied the franchise; he is to be denied liquor also. If I cannot keep my position in the country as an Englishman on the European vote, I wish to be cleared out, for I am not going to the native vote for support.... We must adopt a system of despotism, such as works so well in India, in our relations with the barbarians of South Africa.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> de Gruchy, "The Chastening of the English-Speaking Churches in South Africa," 38.

<sup>140</sup> de Gruchy, "The Chastening of the English-Speaking Churches in South Africa," 47.

<sup>141</sup> "The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa (Revised Second Edition, Braamfontein, 1986)," in *The Kairos Documents*, ed. Gary S. D. Leonard (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research, 2010), 37-80.

<sup>142</sup> Quoted in Regehr, *Perceptions of Apartheid*, 142.

Although Rhodes' motto was "equal rights for every civilized man south of the Zambezi," it is apparent that Rhodes did not see the black man, insofar as he could not write his own name and had property or works, as "civilized".<sup>143</sup> The segregation and white superiority was already entrenched among English settlers less than a century after their arrival.

The arrival of British churches did not change or challenge much of this reality of segregation. John de Gruchy notes that British Christianity arrived in two forms: 1) to serve colonial authorities and settlers, and 2) to domesticate indigenous peoples.<sup>144</sup> Similar to the DRC, English-speaking churches understood their role as that of walking hand-in-hand with the governing authorities, which had now become British, along with its economic interests.<sup>145</sup> In fact, "[I]t was almost inconceivable to both the Anglicans and the Dutch Reformed that they could properly fulfill their public role unless they had the necessary political status."<sup>146</sup>

In the early years of the Anglican Church's arrival to the Cape, Robert Gray, the first Anglican bishop of Cape Town, proposed a potential union with the DRC to more effectively respond to the perceived need for a state church that would unite Christians of European descent.<sup>147</sup> Despite the fact that a union between the Anglican Church and the DRC did not take place, both continued to act as if they were the established church.<sup>148</sup> De Gruchy summarizes it well:

Symbols of the connection between the CPSA [the Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican)], the empire, and colonial authority abound in most Anglican cathedrals in South Africa. But it was not only an Anglican matter. When it came to support for the empire, there was virtual unanimity among all the British churches and missions. British Christianity as a whole (the Quakers being a significant but very small exception) provided the spiritual legitimation for colonial conquest and imperial adventure, as well as moral purpose for the economic advancement of British settlers.<sup>149</sup>

The form of ecclesial identity that arrived with the colonial powers continued to assume a mutual relationship of cooperation with the state. And this continued until the advent of apartheid.

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<sup>143</sup> Regehr, *Perceptions of Apartheid*, 142.

<sup>144</sup> de Gruchy, "The Chastening of the English-Speaking Churches in South Africa," 40.

<sup>145</sup> de Gruchy, "The Chastening of the English-Speaking Churches in South Africa," 42.

<sup>146</sup> de Gruchy, "The Chastening of the English-Speaking Churches in South Africa," 41.

<sup>147</sup> de Gruchy, "The Chastening of the English-Speaking Churches in South Africa," 41.

<sup>148</sup> de Gruchy, "The Chastening of the English-Speaking Churches in South Africa," 41.

<sup>149</sup> de Gruchy, "The Chastening of the English-Speaking Churches in South Africa," 41.

The English-speaking churches, upon their arrival, largely mimicked the already established dichotomy found in the DRC of “settler” and “mission” congregations. The former served white settlers, while the latter, through the presence of “stations”, served those of other races. The mission movement in South Africa typically challenged white settler privilege, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as early missionaries often advocated for those who they lived with and to whom they ministered. Richard Elphick, for example, argues that the seed of South Africa’s egalitarianism has its roots in the theological proclamation of the early missionaries.<sup>150</sup> This posed a constant challenge to white domination.<sup>151</sup>

Missionaries in South Africa tended to be, and were often viewed as, more “liberal” than other settlers. This is especially true of English-speaking missionaries who held more liberal social and political views than many Afrikaners and the DRC. That being said, some Afrikaner missionaries, such as Johannes Theodorus van der Kemp, also bore such “liberal” attitudes.

[Van der Kemp’s] rage against the colonists, and against the regime that supported them, was influenced for the most part neither by the Enlightenment nor by the French Revolution, but by antipathy toward whites who, in his view, falsely claimed to be Christian, and by strong sentimental affection for the Khoisan and slave converts, whom many whites abused and exploited.<sup>152</sup>

Missionaries, notes John de Gruchy, proved to be troublesome as they did not serve the needs of white settlers but strived to be relevant to the conditions and struggles of the “Coloureds” and “Africans”.<sup>153</sup> Early missionaries were often charged with “liberalism” because of their constant challenge against settlers around notions such as egalitarianism regarding people of different races as well as championing, in many cases, the involvement of blacks in the political system.<sup>154</sup> Such convictions challenged the settler community and their confidence that Christianity was a badge of superiority and their charter of group privileges.<sup>155</sup>

And yet, as the mission movement carried on in South Africa, the inter-racial relationship quickly became coopted resulting, as Elphick demonstrates, in a shift

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<sup>150</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 2.

<sup>151</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 2.

<sup>152</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 17.

<sup>153</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 11.

<sup>154</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 4.

<sup>155</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 17.

from egalitarianism to paternalism. Mission stations and the message of many missionaries soon became instruments not of brotherly or sisterly love and equality, but of paternalism and control.<sup>156</sup> As the egalitarian message inherent in the evangelical message of Christian brotherhood and sisterhood became weaker, “the mission station drove a wedge between the missionary and the message he came to preach. In the coming century, Africans, far more than missionaries, would seek out the half-forgotten egalitarian promise and try to resurrect it in the church and in society at large.”<sup>157</sup>

But, as “liberal” as many of the early English-speaking missionaries were regarding the gospel they preached, the one element that remained common was the assumed relationship with the state or empire. De Gruchy notes: “The English-speaking churches were united in their loyalty to the British Empire, and their missionary societies, wittingly or not, enabled the spread of colonialism and the consolidation of imperial power.”<sup>158</sup> Elphick says that “[m]any British government officials of 1900 saw missionaries as patriotic professionals in the service of the British Empire.”<sup>159</sup> James Cochrane notes how Bishop A. B. Webb, the Bishop of Grahamstown in 1897, demonstrated the intimate union between empire and church:

... missionary work, viewed under the light of the Eternal Purpose of God (is) the inner meaning of history,... the ‘far-off divine event to which the whole of creation moves.’

(It is the call) as citizens of our British Empire, and as sons and daughters of our British church, to rise up, in furtherance of this end, to their truly imperial responsibility and their imperial mission and destiny.<sup>160</sup>

The shift from egalitarianism to paternalism among the missionary movement and among English-speaking churches in general largely coincides with the way the ruling British government depicted the ongoing inter-racial relationship. Race continued to be and eventually became a more prominent lens through which the English-speaking churches viewed society. Because of the assumed mutual

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<sup>156</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 20.

<sup>157</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 25.

<sup>158</sup> John de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage: The English-Speaking Churches under Imperialism and Apartheid," in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social & Cultural History* ed. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (Claremont, South Africa: David Philip Publishers [Pty] Ltd., 1997), 156.

<sup>159</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 20.

<sup>160</sup> James Cochrane, *Servants of Power: The Role of English-Speaking Churches 1903 - 1930* (Braamfontein, South Africa: Ravan Press [Pty] Ltd, 1987), 20.

relationship between the church and the state, English-speaking churches assumed, in a more paternalistic fashion, the role of speaking on behalf of the black population,<sup>161</sup> especially with regards to “the native question” in South Africa.<sup>162</sup> In this assumed role, however, “[T]he English-speaking churches, aligned with the South African Party government and, more generally, with white South Africa, were often unable, and usually unwilling, to act in concert with their African memberships in the struggle for equality and justice.”<sup>163</sup> It was largely the increase in educated black Christians, educated in mission schools of these same churches, that changed and affected the character of the so-called English-speaking churches as they began to speak out against legislation introduced to solidify land and privilege for whites.<sup>164</sup> “Still, [the English-speaking churches’] response was ambiguous and qualified, indicative of their endeavor to serve the interest of white congregations while at the same time trying to adopt a more liberal stance on the ‘Native Question.’”<sup>165</sup> Thus we can see the paradox in which the English-speaking churches found themselves – caught between Afrikaner and African nationalism.<sup>166</sup>

#### English-speaking churches during apartheid

With the birth of apartheid and the legislation of segregated – or separate – development, it became increasingly clear that these new laws and legislations not only continued an already unequal society, but sought to put in place a rigid and ideological system that systematically oppressed the majority of people in South Africa. In this new environment some churches increasingly began to criticize this system, seeking ways in which to undermine some of its very principles. One way in which blacks could undermine the continuation of colonialism, albeit in its new and more structurally systemic and rigid form, was in leaving the church structures that

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<sup>161</sup> de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage," 156.

<sup>162</sup> de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage," 156.

<sup>163</sup> de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage," 157.

<sup>164</sup> de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage," 157.

<sup>165</sup> de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage," 157.

<sup>166</sup> de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage," 157.

continued to be under white authority and leadership. This led to the emergence of African Initiated (or Independent) Churches (AICs).<sup>167</sup>

Other ways and examples emerged. In 1957, for example, a proposed “church clause” in the Native Laws Amendment Bill came into being which attempted to force apartheid upon the churches.<sup>168</sup> Like all apartheid legislation, it sought to segregate society racially. Such legislation made it difficult for black people to attend worship in white group areas.<sup>169</sup> Although churches were already largely segregated, the fact that this was now becoming legislated challenged many of the English-speaking churches as the state was now interfering with and dictating the practices of the church.

At this point it is useful to remember the character of mainline churches, which most of the English-speaking churches were, and their history as they emerged from the Reformation in Europe. Although the Reformed tradition accepted the role embodied by the state during the Reformation, the other Protestant traditions that also emerged during that time did not accept the same type of role assumed by the state. For many of the other Protestant traditions the state and church were seen as partners—equals. Thus, as the apartheid government began its attempt to dictate the way in which the church could function, many of the English-speaking churches became uncomfortable with such attempts.

The 1957 attempt at legislating apartheid upon the churches caused an outcry by the English-speaking churches as well as the Roman Catholic Church. Their response to this new legislation, and the revealed character of the government in power, created a new found unity among the English-speaking churches in opposition to the government. It also, for the first time, brought the Roman Catholic Church into ecumenical cooperation in protest against apartheid policy.<sup>170</sup> The attempt to enforce apartheid upon the churches, along with other events such as the massacre at Sharpeville in 1960, demonstrated the character of the apartheid government and the lengths it would go in keeping society racially segregated. These proved to be some of the turning points that caused the English-speaking churches to become more confrontational towards the apartheid government and its policies.

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<sup>167</sup> Also depicted as “Ethiopian” churches. See Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 85-94.

<sup>168</sup> de Gruchy, “Grappling with a Colonial Heritage,” 162.

<sup>169</sup> de Gruchy, “Grappling with a Colonial Heritage,” 162.

<sup>170</sup> de Gruchy, “Grappling with a Colonial Heritage,” 162.

As the character of the apartheid government became more apparent, a renewed spirit of ecumenical involvement began to emerge as the English-speaking churches found a common purpose. Perhaps one of the most significant ecumenical events was the 1960 Cottesloe Consultation, a World Council of Churches (WCC) organized event held in Johannesburg. This consultation included all of the South African member churches of the WCC. At this consultation, delegates, which included representatives from the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) and other Afrikaner churches, debated an ecclesial response to apartheid and, with exception of the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk (NHK), reached a consensus.<sup>171</sup> The statement that emerged from Cottesloe affirmed that all racial groups were eligible for the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship; rejected segregation in the church; rejected the government's prohibition of racially mixed marriages; criticized the migrant labour system and job reservation; and affirmed the right of all people to own land.<sup>172</sup> The Cottesloe declaration challenged much of the fundamental concepts of apartheid policy.<sup>173</sup> Although it did not go as far as many of the black English-speaking church delegates wanted, it was significant in that it had the support of the NGK delegates.<sup>174</sup> Pressure from then Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd shortly afterwards, however, led the NGK synods to reject the Cottesloe Statement and eventually withdraw from further ecumenical participation.<sup>175</sup> The result being that distinct ecclesial lines were then drawn in response to apartheid – the DRC on the one side which helped to theologically justify the policies brought forth by the government which sought racial separation, and the opposition of apartheid and its policies led by many of the English-speaking churches.

Those that remained ecumenically engaged in their common purpose of opposing the injustice of apartheid continued to find ways in which to challenge the political and theological assumptions of apartheid. In 1960, for example, given the reality that membership among English-speaking churches was increasingly non-white, the so-called English-speaking churches came together and formed the Federal Theological Seminary (FEDSEM), a seminary for black theology students. FEDSEM became known not only for shaping black church leaders, but also for its increased

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<sup>171</sup> de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage," 162.

<sup>172</sup> de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage," 162.

<sup>173</sup> de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage," 162.

<sup>174</sup> de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage," 162.

<sup>175</sup> de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage," 162.



emphasis and provision of black theology. In 1966 the WCC Geneva Conference on Church and Society called on all Christians to participate directly in the struggle for justice in situations of oppression and revolution.<sup>176</sup> This led to the founding of WCC's Programme to Combat Racism (PCR), which funded and supported organizations fighting racism, which included liberations movements that were combatting settler governments in southern Africa.<sup>177</sup> In 1968, The Christian Institute of Southern Africa (CI), established by Beyers Naudé who stepped down as the Moderator of the NGK's Southern Transvaal synod when the NGK rejected the Cottesloe Statement, published *The Message to the People of South Africa* rejecting apartheid as a false gospel.<sup>178</sup> The Black Consciousness Movement (BCO) followed shortly thereafter, which, because of the fact that many of the English-speaking churches were comprised primarily of blacks, began to influence church policy in a concerted way.<sup>179</sup> Likewise, among whites, the unwillingness to participate in South African Defense Force (SADF), which was a requirement for all white men, became another way the church challenged the very power (both figurative and literal) on which apartheid rested. "It was a direct challenge to the moral authority and legitimacy of the state, and to the patriotic assumptions of most whites."<sup>180</sup> The KD became one more way in which the ecumenical church sought to challenge the ongoing realities, injustices, and oppression brought about by apartheid and its policies of racial segregation. All of these serve as examples of how the ecumenical movement, of which many of the English-speaking church leaders played vital roles, sought to challenge and oppose apartheid and its ideology.

## English-speaking churches and the state

This is an all-to-brief account of the English-speaking churches and their complex relationships with the colonial history of South Africa, from which apartheid has its roots. It is a story of paradox. On the one hand, the English-speaking churches, upon their arrival, continued the way in which society was racially segregated and laid

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<sup>176</sup> de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage," 163.

<sup>177</sup> de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage," 163.

<sup>178</sup> de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage," 163.

<sup>179</sup> de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage," 164.

<sup>180</sup> de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage," 165.

some of the groundwork for it. Although the English-speaking churches officially condemned legislation of segregation, its practices continued to be segregated. Their members were reluctant to become too involved in changing the structure of society knowing that it would inevitably encroach upon the privilege to which they grew accustomed. This was especially true among their white members who, until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, continued to hold significant positions of leadership, status, and economic power. On the other hand, the English-speaking church leaders were the driving force behind the anti-apartheid ecumenical movement.

As racial segregation and oppression became more entrenched in South Africa society, it became more clear to many that apartheid and its ideology was not, in fact, an expression of Christian values and beliefs. It came to be understood as heresy.<sup>181</sup> This heresy systematically oppressed those declared to be “not white.” As this became more apparent, English-speaking churches played a significant role in seeking the abolishment of this unjust system.

The way in which this struggle was embodied is, however, revealing. Although the English-speaking churches became “churches in opposition,” they operated under the assumption that the state is the primary entity responsible for social change. Society (and the church) would be ordered from those “in power.” Thus the desire to “speak truth to power” – assuming that if pressure was put onto those “in power,” those positions of power would bring about societal change. This is a top—down understanding of power. “Religion,” notes Cochrane, “was regarded as the basis for co-operation on the part for all. When social evils were recognized, pulpit speakers preached ‘a personal regeneration to the sufferers and advocated reform by the State’, but ‘they did not advocate independent struggle by the workers’.”<sup>182</sup> If official state policy were changed, the rest of society would begin to reflect this new just character. Thus, the goal was to change the law and the way in which society would be governed and/or structured. Likewise, the church was structured with the assumption that church leaders are the voice of the church. The rest of the church, therefore, did not feel the necessity to be wholeheartedly involved in the struggle against apartheid. The ecclesial paradigm did not (does not) assume

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<sup>181</sup> John de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio, eds., *Apartheid Is a Heresy* (Cape Town, South Africa: David Philip, 1983).

<sup>182</sup> Cochrane, *Servants of Power*, 184.

that all members of the church would actively live in a way that challenged the ongoing power dynamic that was taking place.

We should be cautious not to undermine the importance of what the English-speaking churches did as they challenged apartheid and the given oppressive and unjust social structure. And yet, we see how the change sought was aimed more at the macro level (social structure and law), and not on the micro or particular level (congregational life and witness). We will see later how this dynamic and ecclesial paradigm has continued, resulting in the church's co-option by the state.

### *Conclusion*

The KD lodged a significant critique against what it described as "State Theology." This was a form of theology that supported and justified the apartheid government and its racially segregating practices. The KD argued that such a theological expression provided erroneous biblical interpretation in justifying apartheid and its policies. "State Theology," the KD argued, perceived the Christian duty as endorsing the social construct the apartheid government sought to create, based on its particular understanding of law and order, while defending against the threat of communism. It demonstrated how the often referred to "God" of the apartheid state was simply used to validate the mighty and its social construction, which is, the KD argues, a different god than that of the Bible.

As noted at the beginning, the intent of this chapter was not to judge whether or not the KD's characterization of "State Theology" was accurate as that would miss the point of the KD and the cry that it came to represent. Rather, the intent was to better understand *how* such a criticism could emerge. As such, this chapter traced some of the history of the South African church as it related to the state – specifically the colonial and then the apartheid state. In doing so the longstanding affiliation between the church and the state becomes apparent. There is a long history whereby the church and the state both assumed they participated in a common agenda, accepting a division of labour: the state being responsible for the political, that is the corporate relations, pertaining to the concrete, material concerns of this world; the

church for the spiritual health of the citizens.<sup>183</sup> As this close and mutual interrelationship between the church and state becomes apparent, we can see how the roots of the KD's characterization of "State Theology" along with its ethical character did not simply pertain to the DRC but was also present in the so-called English-speaking churches. Indeed, the roots are grounded in their common European history and imported to South Africa. Even though the so called English-speaking churches became increasingly uncomfortable with the apartheid government, becoming "the church in opposition," their ecclesial paradigm – a paradigm that suggested its focus should be on individuals and their spiritual health<sup>184</sup> – proved to be a challenge in mobilizing those within their respective churches, especially their white constituency, in embodying an alternative socio-political reality than that mandated through the state. Thus, we can already see how, should we not want to be implicated by the KD's characterization of "State Theology," we must be willing to move beyond these assumed roles between the church and state.

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<sup>183</sup> This is the basic characteristic of Christendom or Constantinianism. More explanation and analysis regarding these concepts will be provided in chapters five and six.

<sup>184</sup> "The Kairos Document," 21. The KD focuses more on this in its criticism of "Church Theology."

2.

## Church Theology in South Africa

The *Kairos Document*'s second critique focused on what it described as "Church Theology." This critique was novel as it challenged those who were cautious about getting involved in the struggle against apartheid primarily, although not entirely, because it was deemed to be a political struggle. Critiques against what the KD described as "State Theology," although necessary, were already quite common. The inclusion of a critique against "Church Theology", however, was new. It targeted the mainstream white church – even though its leadership may have been active in the SACC – as well as the more "evangelical" churches. The KD suggested that a position of inactivity in the struggle against apartheid (whether theological, ecclesial, and/or social) maintained the basic social construct of apartheid, thus maintaining the status quo, which meant the ongoing and continual oppression of those declared to be "non-white."

This chapter will explore and seek to understand the KD's criticism of "Church Theology". The intent is to better understand how perceptions arose that made the depiction of "Church Theology" and the critique against it possible. This analysis will assist in better understanding certain theological persuasions during apartheid while also providing a base-line from which to compare post-apartheid theology.

### *The Kairos Document's Critique of Church Theology*

“Church Theology”, which has also been described as “third way theology”,<sup>185</sup> sought to find a more cautious alternative between two conflicting forces: one that sought to maintain the structure of apartheid and the status quo, the other that sought to dismantle the apartheid system. There were many reasons for caution. Some did not recognize or want to acknowledge the severity of the dilemma apartheid created for the majority of (black) South Africans. Others were not willing to drastically challenge and do away with what the KD saw as an evil and dehumanizing system – in large part because many whites did not recognize and therefore did not understand the situation because of their privileged position in society. The KD challenged this limited, guarded, and cautious approach that:

- failed to engage an in-depth analysis of the given social situation;
- used broad overarching ideas such as “reconciliation”, “justice”, and “non-violence”, which were then applied to the South African context and situation, disregarding the current social realities;
- was superficial in critiquing apartheid as interpersonal conflict rather than a systemic issue of injustice.

The KD critique of Church Theology consisted of four parts: 1) a challenge regarding the nature of “reconciliation”; 2) a challenge regarding the nature of “justice”; 3) a challenge regarding the absolute principle of “non-violence”; and 4) the fundamental problem of the spirituality assumed with this form of theology – a spirituality that separates the Christian message from the physical and worldly realities.

## On Reconciliation

The first criticism the KD lodged against protagonists of Church Theology pertains to the way they portrayed “reconciliation”. It was assumed, the KD argued, that the system of apartheid caused interpersonal conflict. Thus reconciliation was seen as the key to resolving the problem of apartheid. The KD noted how proponents

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<sup>185</sup> See Anthony Balcomb, *Third Way Theology: Reconciliation, Revolution, and Reform in the South African Church During the 1980s* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 1993).

of what it described as “Church Theology” wanted both sides of the conflict to come together so as to listen and learn about one another so that they could overcome their differences and together negotiate a way forward. The KD challenged these assumptions. “There are conflicts,” the KD highlighted, “where one side is a fully armed and violent oppressor while the other side is defenceless and oppressed. There are conflicts that can only be described as the struggle between justice and injustice, good and evil, God and the devil.”<sup>186</sup> The pursuit of reconciliation in such situations is not possible. Evil, injustice, oppression, and sin must first be done away with before it is possible to explore reconciliation between the oppressed and the oppressor. Indeed, the KD put it bluntly:

In our situation in South Africa today it would be totally un-Christian to plead for reconciliation and peace before the present injustices have been removed. Any such plea plays into the hands of the oppressor by trying to persuade those of us who are oppressed to accept our oppression and to become reconciled to the intolerable crimes that are committed against us. That is not Christian reconciliation, it is sin. It is asking us to become accomplices in our own oppression, to become servants of the devil. No reconciliation is possible in South Africa *without justice*.<sup>187</sup>

Likewise, no reconciliation, no forgiveness, is possible without repentance.<sup>188</sup> These are the building blocks for genuine peace and reconciliation, which is desired. “The peace that God wants,” continue the KD authors, “is based upon truth, repentance, justice and love. The peace that the world offers us is a unity that compromises the truth, covers over injustice and oppression, and is totally motivated by selfishness.”<sup>189</sup>

Although the authors of the KD were open to the concept of true reconciliation, they noted how the attempts to bring about reconciliation whilst the apartheid system raged on would fail to bring this about. There first needed to be the abolition of the system and the inevitable inequalities that it fostered, along with a spirit of repentance, and thus a willingness to explore change and transformation, in order for reconciliation to be possible. The authors of the KD did not see such willingness by those who spoke about “reconciliation”.

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<sup>186</sup> "The Kairos Document," 15.

<sup>187</sup> "The Kairos Document," 16.

<sup>188</sup> "The Kairos Document," 16.

<sup>189</sup> "The Kairos Document," 16.

## On Justice

The KD noted the difference between a “justice of reform”, which is determined by the oppressor, or a “radical justice” determined by the people of South Africa – a justice from below.<sup>190</sup> “Church Theology”, the KD argued, was based on the assumption that change would ultimately come from whites or from people “at the top of the pile.”<sup>191</sup> “The general idea appears to be that one must simply appeal to the conscience and the goodwill of those who are responsible for injustice in our land and that once they have repented of their sins and after some consultation with others they will introduce the necessary reforms to the system.”<sup>192</sup> But reforms that come from the top, the KD argued, are never satisfactory. Those who are oppressed must participate in their own dignity and emancipation. True justice, the KD noted, requires a radical change, a change of structures, which can only come from below, from the oppressed themselves for they know how they are suffering and how the current injustice affects them.<sup>193</sup> “God will bring about change through the oppressed as he did through the oppressed Hebrew slaves in Egypt. God does not bring his justice through reforms introduced by the Pharaoh’s of this world.”<sup>194</sup>

## On Non-violence

The KD also challenged the way in which violence and non-violence were understood and portrayed. The term “violence”, it argued, is used to describe the reactions of the oppressed, those who are actively fighting the apartheid system and its actors. But, “violence” is not used to describe the structural and institutional violence embodied in apartheid and through its actors, such as the police and the army. “Thus the phrase ‘violence in the townships’ comes to mean what the young people are doing and not what the police are doing or what apartheid in general is

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<sup>190</sup> “The Kairos Document,” 17.

<sup>191</sup> “The Kairos Document,” 17. This begs the question as to how this depiction of “justice from reform” that carries the assumption that justice and change comes from “the top” compares with the understanding of the new Kairos Southern Africa movement and its perception in how justice and change come about. This will be explored further in chapter five.

<sup>192</sup> “The Kairos Document,” 17.

<sup>193</sup> “The Kairos Document,” 18.

<sup>194</sup> “The Kairos Document,” 18.



doing to people.”<sup>195</sup> Thus the KD portrays the call for non-violence is to call those who are oppressed into account while overlooking the actions of the state and its oppressive system.

The KD also highlighted the irony whereby the same churches calling for non-violence continued to support the growing militarization of the South African state. These churches continue to send their young white males to serve in the armed forces, blessing them and their activity by appointing chaplains, and thus supporting the military infrastructure required to maintain apartheid and its oppressive and unjust ends.

How can one condemn all violence and then appoint chaplains to a very violent and oppressive army? How can one condemn all violence and then allow young white males to accept their conscription into the armed forces? Is it because the activities of the armed forces and the police are counted as defensive? That raises very serious questions about whose side such Church leaders might be on.<sup>196</sup>

In this way, “violence” thus depended on the social situation of those decrying it. The KD argued that at the height of the conflict in the 1980s, it was not possible to be neutral. Neutrality enabled the status quo of oppression, and therefore violence, to continue.<sup>197</sup>

### The fundamental problem

The KD ends its critique on “Church Theology” by attempting to analyze what is at the root of its mistakes and misunderstandings. It identifies three fundamental problems. The first is that protagonists of “Church Theology” lack in depth social analysis. “Church Theology” operates, it argued, on absolute principles, applying these indiscriminately and uncritically in all situations without analyzing what is taking place and therefore unable to respond in a contextually relevant manner. Their analysis of apartheid was simply inadequate.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> "The Kairos Document," 18.

<sup>196</sup> "The Kairos Document," 19-20.

<sup>197</sup> "The Kairos Document," 20.

<sup>198</sup> "The Kairos Document," 20.

The second problem is that protagonists of “Church Theology” lack an adequate understanding of politics and political strategy.<sup>199</sup> Challenging apartheid means changing the structures of society which in turn is a matter of politics. The church must bring the gospel into this political situation. The KD openly challenged the apolitical tendency of “Church Theology”.

The last and most fundamental problem the KD note is the form of spirituality embraced by “Church Theology”. This form of spirituality, it noted, assumes that the gospel and Christian spirituality are primarily otherworldly affairs and have very little to do with the socio-political affairs of the world. Inversely, it assumes that social and political matters have little or nothing to do with the spiritual matters of the church.<sup>200</sup> Spirituality is understood to be private and individualistic. This perception separates these two spheres from one another and leaves very little room for human agency. God will act in God’s own time. The participation of the human is largely limited to praying for God’s intervention.<sup>201</sup>

As noted earlier, the *Kairos Document*’s critique against Church Theology proved to be quite novel in that it challenged those who may have been critical of apartheid but who did not actively find ways of struggling against its social construction. The KD’s critique challenged the church in South Africa to think and revisit not only where they stood in the ongoing crises of apartheid, but also in the way they challenged the injustices of apartheid. And this provides a glimpse into the way power was understood, the way in which change would happen, and the very nature and meaning of the Christian message itself in the face of injustice.

### *“Church Theology” in South Africa*

We noted in the introduction that the three forms of theology the *Kairos Document* describes are in a way caricatures and generalizations of ways in which the church responded (or did not respond) to apartheid and the ongoing suffering and injustice it caused to many. Although some have argued that these caricatures lacked

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<sup>199</sup> "The Kairos Document," 20.

<sup>200</sup> "The Kairos Document," 21.

<sup>201</sup> "The Kairos Document," 21.

theological and political precision,<sup>202</sup> it is important, as noted in the previous chapter, to understand why such a criticism would emerge.

As mentioned briefly in the introduction of this chapter, the KD's critique of "Church Theology" targeted the mainstream white church as well as the more "evangelical" churches. The previous chapter on "State Theology" largely focused on churches that one could describe as "mainline". Thus the rest of this chapter will focus on churches that are more "evangelical" in orientation. One will, however, undoubtedly recognize the overlap between the two. Churches that were more "evangelical" in nature, especially the white ones, enjoyed the privilege of thinking they were able to remove themselves from the conflict that swirled around the life of the apartheid system. And yet, as the KD argues, such churches inevitably participated in and benefited from the system that provided them such privilege, even while they attempted to preach an apolitical gospel. Although one can find many examples of such a theological orientation, this chapter will focus on two particular examples: the Baptist Union of Southern Africa and the (white) Pentecostal church.<sup>203</sup>

Such a privileged perspective also emerged in subtle ways; even by those who saw the evil of apartheid and sought to overcome the hostility it created in order to reconcile the different groups that it separated. This was the motive behind the National Initiative for Reconciliation. And yet, although this initiative sought to be socially engaged, which already distinguishes itself from the two other examples, in that it sought to provide an alternative to the conflict raging on between those who sought to maintain apartheid and those who sought to overthrow it, its practices, as this work will demonstrate, continued to operate on the assumption of white privilege and power, thus maintaining the oppressiveness of the status quo.

The rest of this chapter will explore some of the history of the ecclesial expressions mentioned above that led to the KD's description of "Church Theology".

## The Baptist Union of Southern Africa

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<sup>202</sup> Michael Cassidy, *The Passing Summer: A South African Pilgrimage in the Politics of Love* (London, UK: Hodder & Staughton, 1989), 321.

<sup>203</sup> It should be noted that by the time the KD emerged in 1985 several neo-Pentecostal and neo-Charismatic churches were on the rise that also would largely fit within the KD's characterization of "Church Theology". Indeed, Ray McCauley's Rhema Bible Church's mega-church building opened the same year as the KD.

The once overwhelmingly white Baptist Union of Southern Africa offers a particularly lucid example of the extent to which a denomination became captive to secular values and political rhetoric, how its biblical foundations became subordinated thereto, and how it surrendered much of its prophetic voice on the pervasive question of race relations.<sup>204</sup>

Thus begins Frederick Hale's explanation in how the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BU) came to support – if not actively, then at least passively – apartheid and its system of racial segregation. Hale demonstrates that, although the BU never spoke with “one voice,” given its ecclesiological nature that emphasized congregational autonomy, there was a noticeable shift from a willingness to raise concerns and speak out as a denominational body against the political landscape and direction to an increased hesitation, or flat out refusal to get involved in matters that it deemed “political.” According to Hale, this shift came about as a result of not having a consistent meta-ethical foundation from which to act or make decisions, “notwithstanding the tradition of regarding the Bible as the primary font of divine truth and the norm for Christian ethics.”<sup>205</sup> Louise Kretzschmar adds that BU's failure to embody such a meta-ethical foundation is primarily because of its privatization of the Christian faith.<sup>206</sup>

The first known Anglophone Baptist arrived in South Africa in the 1820s. From that time Baptist churches began to emerge. By 1877, the Baptist congregations came together to form the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BU). Although in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the BU repeatedly asserted that the BU would avoid taking positions on public issues, lest they follow the paths of the more “political” churches who were part of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), in the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Frederick Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” *Journal of Church and State*: 754.

<sup>205</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 754. This was also, according to Hale, the reason why Richard Steele, one of the first Conscientious Objectors in South Africa, “regarded his Baptist nurturing as insufficient for meeting the socio-political crisis in South Africa in which he was intimately involved and, concomitantly, why he found the pacifism of the Mennonite heritage far more relevant.” See Frederick Hale, “Baptist Ethics of Conscientious Objection to Military Service in South Africa: The Watershed Case of Richard Steele,” *Acta Theologica*, no. 2 (2005).

<sup>206</sup> See Louise Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith: Mission, Social Ethics and the South African Baptists* (Accra, Ghana: Legon Theological Studies; Asempa Publishers; Christian Council of Ghana, 1998).

century the BU acted more in accordance with their early “nonconformist conscience” that emerged as part of the early Baptist tradition.<sup>207</sup>

Although Kretzschmar contests whether Baptist nonconformity was ever extended from religious affairs to the socio-political realm,<sup>208</sup> Hale demonstrates how the BU did speak out on socio-political issues. One example was their response to the newly formed South African Union’s Defence Bill of 1912 that created the possibility for military conscription. The editor of *The South African Baptist*, J.J. Doke strongly and openly opposed this bill, and thus gave it a great deal of exposure in the journal.<sup>209</sup> “Consequently, in October 1912, the [Baptist Union] Assembly passed a resolution stating that the Baptist tradition had ‘always emphasized the sacredness of conscience, and has stood for civil and religious liberty.’ Accordingly, the delegates recorded their ‘regret that the principle of compulsion should have been embodied in the South African Defence Act’ and urged the parliament to amend the statute so as to abolish conscription.”<sup>210</sup>

Although there was typically a hesitation to endorse Christian involvement in politics,<sup>211</sup> some, such as Alf. Law Palmer, the mayor of Johannesburg and a Baptist, declared categorically that “if Christianity is not applicable to politics then Christianity is an antiquated delusion.”<sup>212</sup> Palmer also stated that “‘the real responsibility for controlling the destinies of a city or a nation’ rested with ‘God’s own people.’”<sup>213</sup> W.E. Cursons, in 1938, delivered one of the most carefully reasoned Baptist statements on Christian political involvement. Cursons “perceived the Baptist Union as standing midway between the poles of total detachment from politics... and what he termed ‘social service—good national and even international citizenship.’”<sup>214</sup> Cursons, in lamenting that British Baptists stood closer to the church’s indifference

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<sup>207</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 755. Hale offers two such examples. This first pertained to the question as to whether Baptist missionaries in southern Africa should accept land offered to them by Cecil Rhodes’ Chartered Company which was taken through force. The second was the BU’s pro-British sentiments articulated at the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Boer War in 1899 (Ibid., 755-756).

<sup>208</sup> Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith*, 35.

<sup>209</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 756.

<sup>210</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 756.

<sup>211</sup> Examples of which already appeared in the 1920s where some argued that “Christians should eschew political involvement both individually and collectively.” See Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 757.

<sup>212</sup> As quoted by Frederick Hale in “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 757.

<sup>213</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 757.

<sup>214</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 757.

regarding political involvement, turned to several 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century British nonconformists who believed that Christian public involvement was a duty as good citizens in the world.<sup>215</sup>

In the 1930s and 1940s, the BU exerted some pressure on the different racial policies that were in existence and those that were being introduced.<sup>216</sup> During this time the BU continued to take almost annual stands against racially discriminatory governmental policies. This could have served to create “an ethical-rhetorical tradition that could have served it well as a bulwark against the implementation of full-scale apartheid a few years later.”<sup>217</sup> But, as noted earlier, although the BU spoke out against racial discrimination, they lacked a “Christian meta-ethics to which they could appeal.”<sup>218</sup> Thus, official pronouncement did not equate to alternative practice.

Although the BU had periodically raised a critical voice on social and political issues, its willingness to do so decreased as apartheid became more and more entrenched. Towards the beginning of official apartheid, the BU raised a critical voice against some of the implementations being introduced by the Nationalist Party and its policy of apartheid. One example was the introduction and implementation of the Christian National Education by the National Party. Many English speaking South African citizens whose ancestral roots were British, of which the BU was largely composed, had difficulty with the Afrikaaner interpretation of South African history presented through the Christian National Education policy whereby the hand of God moved particularly in the story of the Afrikaans *volk*. Such a portrayal thus wedded Christianity with Afrikaner nationalism.<sup>219</sup> “It was, in effect, an endeavor to imbue South Africa’s school systems with the notion that the Afrikaners were a people of divine destiny whom God had given a particular role to play in leading the Union of South Africa.”<sup>220</sup> The BU took issue with this interpretation and presentation of history and *volk* Christianity which they argued was “contrary to the spirit of Christ and a denial of personal freedom.”<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 757.

<sup>216</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 758.

<sup>217</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 759.

<sup>218</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 759.

<sup>219</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 760.

<sup>220</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 760.

<sup>221</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 760.

In 1949 they issued a similar pronouncement, describing the educational transition as the “concomitant subordination of education for non-whites.”<sup>222</sup> The BU again raised a similar concern in 1953 when the apartheid government announced its Bantu Education Act, which had the affect of removing churches from the field of “native education” resulting in the separation of mission schools from their sponsoring agencies and placing them under the supervision of the Department of Native Affairs.<sup>223</sup> In their Assembly in 1954, the BU, seeing how much the Bantu Education Act restricted the voice and work of the churches, put together a more bold resolution that dealt with three aspects of the law:

The first expressed the Assembly’s concern that the Verwoerdian understanding of education for black Africans, which was to prepare them almost exclusively for subordinate positions, would prevent most of the “Bantu people” from becoming “worthy members of society.” The second was an outcry against “the gradual exclusion of the Christian Church from the field of education.” In the third, for what appears to have been purely pragmatic reasons, delegates expressed their objection to the provision of the Bantu Education Act that blacks must financially provide and maintain their own schools, and they urged the government to make special appropriations towards the attainment of those ends.<sup>224</sup>

The BU again raised its critical voice early against the apartheid government when it extended its racial policies into the churches. The Native Laws Amendment Act, which was introduced in 1952, forbade integrated worship and worship by non-whites in white only areas. In 1957, the Executive of the BU denounced the bill in a letter to the Minister of Native Affairs where the primary concern raised was the way in which the bill restricted the freedom of its people to assemble in public worship.<sup>225</sup>

Without discussing Baptist ecclesiology in detail, the Executive explained that the unity of all believers was crucial to Christianity in terms of both faith and witness. When the church could no longer witness to its own unity, but stood divided along racial lines, it ceased to be vital. This was obedience to the biblical commandment to be ‘one in Christ.’ Alluding to Acts 5:29, the Executive stated that in the event of a conflict of loyalties Christians had no choice but to exercise civil disobedience, that is, ‘to obey God rather than man.’ The pending legislation, the Executive warned, ‘will compel law-abiding Baptists, together with members of many other churches, to violate the law. This we do not desire to do, but where conscience and legislation conflict we must take our stand with our conscience, whatever the consequences may be.’<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 760.

<sup>223</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 760.

<sup>224</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 761.

<sup>225</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 762.

<sup>226</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 762.

The irony, of course, is that the churches that comprised the BU when this was written were already largely if not wholly segregated along racial lines.

These examples demonstrate the willingness of the BU to occasionally raise a critical voice on social and political issues; especially there was a perceived threat to personal – and particularly religious – freedom. Unfortunately these examples of their willingness to be critical and vocal on social and political issues proved to be anomalies, “exceptions in a decrescendo of expressed social conscience within the denomination.”<sup>227</sup> Furthermore, although the BU occasionally issued official resolutions, their resolutions rarely affected their lived practice. “Unfortunately, the available evidence supports the view that ‘unity’ was not understood to be a unity that transcended racial and cultural lines and, in this sense, the Baptist Union’s aims of ‘unity, brotherly love and mutual assistance’ were certainly not achieved.”<sup>228</sup> The social structures that had already become commonplace, even before the official birth of apartheid, were duplicated within the Baptist church as well.

Although criticism of apartheid never fully died out among the Baptists, “it clearly went into remission.”<sup>229</sup> One of the significant reasons for this, besides the comfort enjoyed and expected in the way society had become structured, was the growing fear of communism.<sup>230</sup> By the 1960s Africa was becoming de-colonized while the Cold War was gaining momentum. The growing fear of communism fed the notion that certain precautions had to be taken to combat this new formidable force in order to maintain economic and, more importantly, Christian order. Thus, although the BU may have, earlier on, expressed some concern regarding apartheid and its social engineering system, there was soon a larger force and concern which displaced their concern over apartheid.

John Poorter, President of the BU from 1957 – 1958 and then again in 1964 – 1965 as well as editor of *The South African Baptist* in the 1960s and 1970s, wrote in a 1962 editorial entitled “The Red Invasion of Africa” how everybody was being injected with deadly Marxist propaganda.<sup>231</sup> Poorter’s concern focused specifically on programs whereby young Africans were educated in the Soviet Union and then

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<sup>227</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 762-63.

<sup>228</sup> Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith*, 37.

<sup>229</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 763.

<sup>230</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 763.

<sup>231</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 763.



repatriated to their homelands to become, what he thought and feared, “channels of Soviet influence in European colonies in Africa and neophyte independent countries on that continent.”<sup>232</sup> Hale notes that the South African apartheid government could not have found a more resonant ally than Poorter in their “total onslaught” rhetorical strategy.<sup>233</sup>

Allen Townsend, another editor of *The South African Baptist*, provides another similar example. South Africa, believed Townsend, was still a bastion of *Christian* civilization.<sup>234</sup> And it was this *Christian* civilization that was in jeopardy through the emergence of communism.

Another moment of revelation with regards to the character of the BU and its attitude toward apartheid arose when the SACC released its *Message to the People of South Africa* in 1968. *The Message* argued that apartheid itself, not merely the abuse of it, ran contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and was hostile to Christianity.<sup>235</sup> Many white Baptists received *The Message* with hostility.<sup>236</sup> For Allen Townsend “the accusations that apartheid offered an alternative gospel were ‘arrant nonsense,’ ostensibly because ‘separate development’ is not a ‘gospel’ at all, nor is it being offered as an alternative to the Gospel; its area of relevance is only a fractional part of the total relevance of the Christian Gospel; it is a technique (accepted by the majority of the country’s electorate) for the government of a multiracial community.”<sup>237</sup> According to Townsend apartheid and its social strategy was one way of dealing with the “problem” of race. What’s more, as Hale correctly notes, the assumption through which Townsend operates is that God and the Gospel message is personal in nature: “and, in this matter of salvation, nothing, but nothing can take the place of a restored personal relationship to Him through an individual commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. To this, the heart of the Gospel, all other issues are secondary.”<sup>238</sup> Thus, in response to the SACC’s *The Message*, the BU, in its next Assembly, reduced its

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<sup>232</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 763.

<sup>233</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 764.

<sup>234</sup> Hale, "Baptist Ethics of Conscientious Objection to Military Service in South Africa: The Watershed Case of Richard Steele," 24.

<sup>235</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 764.

<sup>236</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 764.

<sup>237</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 764-65.

<sup>238</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 765. Hale is here quoting Allen C. Townsend, "Politics and the Gospel," *The South African Baptist* November (1968): 12-13.

membership in the SACC from “full status” to “observer status” thus distancing itself further from any kind of Christian assault on the apartheid system.<sup>239</sup>

Both Poorter and Townsend demonstrate the more conservative direction that many white Baptists took throughout apartheid and its social engineering strategy. Although there were some concerns expressed about apartheid, the overall practice of most white Baptists failed to challenge the system that was created and enforced. Indeed, most white Baptists became fellow defenders of the system, and failed to support those who would challenge it.

The BU’s failure in not challenging apartheid, but also in not supporting those who would challenge it, is highlighted in the way it treated those few white Baptists—such as Peter Moll, Richard Steele, and Graham Philpott—who would take a stand by not serve in the South African Defense Force (SADF), the force that sustained the apartheid system. Most white Baptist men participated readily in the SADF by fulfilling their military service obligation. The BU also provided chaplains for the SADF.

The experiences of Conscience Objectors are quite telling. Richard Steele, for example, found no support from many Baptists when he consulted with them as he wrestled with the decision as to whether to comply with his military service call up.<sup>240</sup> Steele’s registering officer, the prominent Baptist chaplain Andrew van den Aardweg, was quite antagonistic with him as he reportedly told Steele that “conscientious objectors should be made to walk through mine fields or simply put up against a brick wall and shot.”<sup>241</sup> While Steele was in detention because of his decision not to serve in the SADF, no Baptist chaplain ever came to visit him.<sup>242</sup>

Hale argues that in October of 1985 the BU apparently “awoke” from its relative slumber regarding apartheid.<sup>243</sup> In 1985, the BU sent an open letter to the then Prime Minister, P. W. Botha, calling for the termination of apartheid and the execution of other major reforms.<sup>244</sup> The concerns raised in the letter, however, were more about the pragmatic failure of the state of emergency imposed and its failure to achieve its goals rather than the theological issues that apartheid itself raised.

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<sup>239</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 765.

<sup>240</sup> Hale, “Baptist Ethics of Conscientious Objection to Military Service in South Africa,” 30.

<sup>241</sup> Hale, “Baptist Ethics of Conscientious Objection to Military Service in South Africa,” 36.

<sup>242</sup> Hale, “Baptist Ethics of Conscientious Objection to Military Service in South Africa,” 40.

<sup>243</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 766.

<sup>244</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 766.

Although the decision to write and send this letter was approved at the BU Assembly (with 156 voting in favour, 56 opposed, and 13 delegates abstaining<sup>245</sup>), it was met with substantial *internal* resistance. One of the primary concerns raised about the letter sent to Botha was that it departed from an “ostensible tradition of avoiding political involvement.”<sup>246</sup>

Two examples of resistance to the decision of writing this letter came from R. A. Gorven and P. J. Raubenheimer.

I am dreadfully concerned at the fact that the Baptist Church is becoming involved in politics.

Nowhere does Scripture teach that the Church has any right, duty or obligation to interfere in, or even approach, or attempt to direct the government.

The Bible “teaches that, however unjust or dictatorial it may be, the Christian is subject to the government and must accept it as ordained of God.”<sup>247</sup>

Gorven even suggested that the BU should write a letter of apology to Botha for its attempt at interfering in “political matters.”<sup>248</sup> Raubenheimer, in response to the letter, states: “After thorough research and praying for God’s guidance I can say convincingly that the main cause lies beyond apartheid and we will find the main cause of all the trouble at no other place than Communism.”<sup>249</sup> Because of this threat, Raubenheimer not only criticized the letter to Botha but also supported the state of emergency of that time.

Such responses demonstrate how the BU over time became captive to the values of apartheid, its social engineering project as well as its political rhetoric. As the two examples above demonstrate, the overwhelming assumption was that the Christian faith—at best—had nothing to do or nothing to say regarding political and social realities, or—at worst—actively supported the maintenance of the status quo of apartheid’s social structure and rule. Ultimately it was the BU’s failure to not speak out against apartheid as well as not live in a way that challenged its policies in the very being of the church that caused the Baptist Convention, the Black Baptist Church, to sever its relationship with the BU in 1987. “They [black Baptists] were no

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<sup>245</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 767.

<sup>246</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 766.

<sup>247</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 768. Hale is here drawing on Gorven’s contribution to *The South African Baptist*. See R. A. Gorven, *The South African Baptist* December (1985).

<sup>248</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 768.

<sup>249</sup> Hale, “The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid,” 768.

longer willing to tolerate oppression at the hands of whites; they were determined that if unity was to be achieved it would be a meaningful unity and not just a continuation of the old pattern of white dominance and black acquiescence.”<sup>250</sup> The way in which white Baptists did not respond to apartheid and its injustice, but continued to live according to its socially engineered reality demonstrates the BU’s social and political captivity.<sup>251</sup>

Louise Kretzschmar suggests that this social and political captivity of the BU is a result of a more general privatization of faith defined as: “the limitation of the Christian Gospel to the private spiritual concerns of the individual”<sup>252</sup> whereby the social and political ramifications of the Gospel are either ignored or misunderstood. The result is that a privatized faith avoids the public sphere or responds to it in an uncritical manner.<sup>253</sup> Kretzschmar argues that a privatized faith is a result of the process of secularization. In this process “religious authority is first opposed by the growing secular powers, then becomes more and more alienated from social affairs and is, finally, limited to the existential realm of individual persons.”<sup>254</sup> Because it is assumed that the state is the entity responsible for the social lives of its citizens, the role of religion becomes focused on the individual and their private lives. Thus, the BU, and those who operate under an apolitical assumption regarding Christianity, assumes the separation between the church and the state.

Ironically, Liberal ideology, although it does not advocate for a Christendom style, symmetrical relationship between the church and the state, does continue to operate according to the agreed upon roles that emerged through Constantinianization, which became the bedrock on which Christendom was built. They both – Liberalism and Christendom – operate based on a Constantinian imagination whereby it is assumed that the state takes care of the public and social concerns, whereas the church takes care of the individual and his or her spiritual concerns. In this way, as Kretzschmar notes, religion becomes limited to the sphere of the private, individual life.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith*, 312.

<sup>251</sup> Hale, "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid," 776.

<sup>252</sup> Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith*, 1.

<sup>253</sup> Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith*, 2.

<sup>254</sup> Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith*, 19.

<sup>255</sup> Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith*, 19.

Kretzschmar highlights four key features of privatization, to which, she argues, the BU fell victim. The first feature of privatization is that such a theology becomes inherently dualistic. Dualism is seen on several levels:

- between the spiritual and the material;
- between the secular and the sacred;
- between saving souls and social involvement;
- and between theological statements and political activism.

Dualisms create a wedge between the experiences and realities of this world from the world that is hoped will someday come. The social implications of this world are not the foci of faith and religion which concern themselves with a different world – the one that is promised. Affairs of “this world” are thus managed by the powers that have been put in place to maintain order and govern within this world – i.e., the state. Faith and bodies that cultivate faith (i.e., the church) are to focus on the individual and on spiritual preparation for the next world. Such dualism, apparently concerned with piety, ultimately fails to take seriously the ways in which the Christian message affects the present, the social, and the political. Kretzschmar thus concludes that “a particular social group (eg [sp]white Baptists) may indulge in a ‘corporate’ form of withdrawal from the world which, ironically, permits individual believers to practise a ‘this-worldly’ adherence to the advancement of themselves and their social group at the expense of the welfare of their black ‘brothers and sisters’ in the faith.”<sup>256</sup>

A second feature of a privatised faith is the spiritualization of the gospel. This feature, notes Kretzschmar, interprets elements such as hunger, blindness, poverty as pertaining to spiritual needs. Such elements are a result of sin, which is understood as alienation from God. Sin and salvation are treated as exclusively vertical (God-human), which falls far short from a holistic spirituality.<sup>257</sup>

A third feature of privatization is the lack of contextual analysis. “Theological doctrines (such as justification by faith) are isolated from their original socio-historical context and uncritically imposed on the present context.”<sup>258</sup> The lack of

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<sup>256</sup> Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith*, 23-24.

<sup>257</sup> Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith*, 24.

<sup>258</sup> Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith*, 24.

such analysis results in both an intellectual and social disengagement. Specifically pertaining to South African Baptists, Kretzschmar notes:

Baptists have distanced themselves, intellectually, from the thinking of academic theologians, especially from South African contextual theologians, and from social sciences such as sociology, history and psychology. Socially, white Baptists are distanced from the exploitation, poverty, fear, and lack of opportunity that is the daily experience of black Baptists. Equally, they are isolated from the black consciousness and resistance movements. Consequently, the white members of the Baptist Union are largely detached from the intellectual and social context of black Baptists and are, thus, able to perpetuate a privatised and inward looking 'laager' mentality.<sup>259</sup>

These elements reinforce the fourth and final element of a privatized faith – individualism. Individualism is the fruit of Christian doctrines interpreted in a privatized way. Salvation, for example, is understood primarily (if not exclusively) as the justification and sanctification of the individual and not of society or the world at large.<sup>260</sup> Kretzschmar notes how this has led to Baptists' willingness to accept the dictum whereby the renewal of the individual automatically reforms society.<sup>261</sup> Yet, she notes, this dictum is inadequate as it seriously underestimates the power of corporate evil.<sup>262</sup>

Kretzschmar concludes her argument by quoting Gerhard Ebeling, which sheds some light into the nature and character of the BU's embodied theology:

Christianity is constantly in danger of becoming pagan precisely where it seeks to be most pious... the spiritual realm is then made into a world on its own, a separate reality which passes by the world as it really is, instead of engaging with it... The extreme possibilities of separation join hands: atheistic and, as it were, purely religious, purely spiritual talk of God. *Both leave the world without God and God without the world.*<sup>263</sup>

Kretzschmar's book helps us understand the privatised faith the BU came to embody during the apartheid era and how such a faith manacled many whites from standing in solidarity with their black brothers and sisters in Christ because of their desire to remain neutral and apolitical. Such a faith, however, disassociated itself from the social implications of what it means to believe in and follow Jesus Christ. The pursuit of a "real" or pure gospel became contextually and socially separate. Thus, the

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<sup>259</sup> Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith*, 25.

<sup>260</sup> Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith*, 26.

<sup>261</sup> Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith*, 26.

<sup>262</sup> Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith*, 26.

<sup>263</sup> Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith*, 27.

church, in order to remain neutral and pure, needed to remain apolitical – disassociated from the social – if it wanted to remain faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The BU’s pursuit towards this end failed to challenge the ongoing unjust social conditions of racial segregation, injustice, and oppression that was already in full swing when the BU was born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and which culminated in the system of apartheid. Given the result and lasting legacy of such an apolitical approach, especially for those who were not white in South Africa, it is no wonder that the KD raised the critique it did.

### The (white) Pentecostal church

Unfortunately, the story of Pentecostalism in South Africa, especially among white Pentecostals, is not all that different from the story of the Baptist Union. Like the BU, Pentecostals conceded “to the pressures of a racist society.”<sup>264</sup> In this section we will briefly look at the ways in which white Pentecostals emerged and the ways they responded to apartheid through their attitudes, concerns, and practices.

Before we begin to look specifically at the South African context, it is helpful to take a look into the nature of Pentecostalism when it first emerged. Many Pentecostal historians have highlighted the “non-racial” nature of the revival that took place on Azusa Street in 1906, the birthplace of Pentecostalism. “[T]he color line was washed away in the blood.”<sup>265</sup> This interracial harmony is indeed important to highlight, especially given the context in which it emerged – 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. – the most racist period in U. S. history. “At Azusa Street people of all races and social backgrounds ‘achieved a new sense of dignity and community in fully integrated Pentecostal services.’”<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Iain MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 68.

<sup>265</sup> L. Lovett, "Black Origins of the Pentecostal Movement," in *Aspects of Pentecostal - Charismatic Origins*, ed. Vinson Synan (Plainfield, N.J.: Logos International, 1975), 131. It is interesting, however, that Lovett describes the Azusa Street revival in such a way – that the color line was washed away in the blood – yet later distinguishes the church in which this revival took place as a “Black” church to which whites came. Lovett’s description highlights how, even though the focus is on the interracial element of this movement, there is a tendency to disregard such traits and impose one’s own assumptions – that it is either “black” or “white”. We so often fail to let such traits change the way we describe such events.

<sup>266</sup> Allan Anderson, *Bazalwane: African Pentecostals in South Africa* (Pretoria, South Africa: University of South Africa, 1992), 23.

Yet, very soon after the initial Azusa Street revival, the racial conflict of the time began to affect the way and the form of the revivalist churches that were emerging. Soon after the initial revival, white congregants found it difficult to be led by a black man – a “son of a slave.” The result being the formation of new racially divided churches that had their roots in the Azusa Street revival, but which found their footing under white leadership as opposed to accepting black leadership.

In many ways the emergence of Pentecostalism in the U.S. is very similar to the emergence of Pentecostalism in South Africa. Pentecostals first emerged in South Africa in 1908. The first gatherings and meetings of Pentecostal churches in South Africa, the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), like the first ones in Azusa, were also integrated. Yet, 4 months later the Executive Council of the AFM began to infer that “adequate accommodation” for coloured people was needed; inferring that the location in which whites met was not suitable for those who were “coloured.”<sup>267</sup>

By 1909 the Executive already began to designate the roles within the church as well as the sacramental practices on race. In February 1909, for example, the Executive of the AFM decided that the “Native Work” Superintendent had to be white.<sup>268</sup> By July of the same year, they stated that baptism of whites, coloureds, and natives would also be separate. By 1910, the National conferences were separate for whites and blacks, and the “Native Council’s” decisions would be reviewed by an all-white Executive Council. Two short years after the emergence of the first Pentecostal churches in South Africa, even though its birth was racially integrated, racial segregation became rooted in its ecclesial structures and theology. “By 1915 this racist attitude had become even more pronounced, when the Executive Council declared that no ordination or leadership appointment could be made by a Black church official except with the consent of the White Superintendent.”<sup>269</sup>

Already by 7 July 1917 the Executive Council adopted the following resolution:

... we do not teach or encourage social equality between Whites and Natives. We recognise that God is no respecter of persons, but that in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him. We therefore preach the Gospel

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<sup>267</sup> C. R. De Wet, “The Apostolic Faith Mission in Africa: 1908-1980. A Case Study in Church Growth in a Segregated Society” (University of Cape Town, 1989), 60.

<sup>268</sup> Wet, “The Apostolic Faith Mission in Africa: 1908-1980. A Case Study in Church Growth in a Segregated Society,” 161.

<sup>269</sup> Anderson, *Bazalwane*, 33.



equally to all peoples, making no distinctions. We wish it to be generally known that our White, Coloured and Native peoples have their separate places of worship, where the Sacraments are administered to them (De Wet 1989:165).<sup>270</sup>

Pentecostalism as a new Christian expression in South Africa quickly accepted the socio-political context in which it emerged. Although its inter-racial birth in South Africa mirrored that of Azusa, it very quickly accepted the segregation that was already prominent in society and in the church. By 1944, the AFM adopted a resolution on “race relations” which stated that “[t]he mission stands for segregation. The fact that the Native, Indian and Coloured is saved does not render him European...”<sup>271</sup> The racial distinction that was becoming more prominent in South Africa was also becoming more prevalent in the Pentecostal church and its church structures.

Thus, when the National Party came into power in 1948 and introduced its official policy of apartheid, it did not bring about a drastic change in the already established social relations; it simply made what was already largely practiced into law. And this shift did not encounter a lot of resistance from white Pentecostals. In the AFM’s magazine *The Comforter*, C. P. Du Plessis wrote an article entitled “The church and racism” where he affirmed his belief in the mental, emotional and spiritual superiority of the White race, which he based on scriptures.”<sup>272</sup> White Pentecostals already largely assumed what the National Party legislated as apartheid.

White Pentecostals eventually began to re-interpret the origins of their own Pentecostal movement. Whereas Pentecostal historians generally point to William Seymour as the initiator of Pentecostalism and demonstrate how the origins of the Pentecostal movement was closely related with the poor and oppressed, black leadership, power, and dignity,<sup>273</sup> leaders in the white Pentecostal church began to down play these connections in Pentecostalism’s birth. Dr. Francois Möller, for example, a former President of the AFM, summarily wrote off the black origins of the Pentecostal movement. Möller wrote: “Later Seymour was replaced by more able

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<sup>270</sup> Anderson, *Bazalwane*, 33.

<sup>271</sup> Anderson, *Bazalwane*, 33.

<sup>272</sup> De Wet, “The Apostolic Faith Mission in Africa: 1908-1980. A Case Study in Church Growth in a Segregated Society,” 179-80. See also Anderson, *Bazalwane*, 34, and Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 65.

<sup>273</sup> Anderson, *Bazalwane*, 34.

people and the different races ceased worship together.”<sup>274</sup> Allan Anderson notes that “[i]t was no doubt because of this ‘understanding’ that Blacks were accorded no legal status in the AFM for over 75 years.”<sup>275</sup>

This leads Anderson to conclude that Pentecostalism “expended its revolutionary impulses in veiled, ineffectual, displaced attacks that amounted to withdrawal from the social struggle and passive acquiescence to a world they hated and wished to escape.”<sup>276</sup> Japie Lapoorta asserts that Pentecostals began to preach the “gospel” as if it was separate from the context in which it was preached.<sup>277</sup> “They preached a gospel that concentrated only on the souls of human beings as if they had no bodies. They closed their eyes to the situation in which they were placed by God to witness and to proclaim the full gospel to the total human being.”<sup>278</sup>

Whereas the history of the AFM was, almost from its birth, officially segregated, the history and emergence of the Assemblies of God (AOG), the second oldest Pentecostal church in South Africa is a little different. Because the AOG’s birth in 1909 arose primarily from expatriate missionaries from the U.S. working in mainly rural, black areas, the birth and growth of the AOG was primarily black.<sup>279</sup> Furthermore, whereas the AFM organized itself in a centralized manner, the AOG was at first nothing more than a large umbrella for a variety of autonomous groups.<sup>280</sup> The benefit of this type of organization was that, because those under the umbrella of the AOG enjoyed relative autonomy from others under the same umbrella, the AOG did not create an official position that determined the practice of all those under its umbrella. This allowed both blacks and whites to emerge and provide significant leadership. “For the first half of the century, the major membership component of the AOG was its Black churches. Only in the latter half did a significant number of White churches arise within the denomination. This meant that indigenous White churches and leadership came to exist alongside indigenous Black churches and leadership.”<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Anderson, *Bazalwane*, 28. Translated from Afrikaans in J. N. Horn, “The Experience of the Spirit in Apartheid South Africa,” *Azusa* 1, no. 1 (1990): 29.

<sup>275</sup> Anderson, *Bazalwane*, 28.

<sup>276</sup> Anderson, *Bazalwane*, 28-29.

<sup>277</sup> Anderson, *Bazalwane*, 26.

<sup>278</sup> Japie Lapoorta, “The Necessity for a Relevant Pentecostal Witness in South Africa,” *EPTA Bulletin* 10, no. 1 (1991): 26.

<sup>279</sup> Lapoorta, “The Necessity for a Relevant Pentecostal Witness in South Africa,” 26.

<sup>280</sup> Mathew S. Clark, “Two Contrasting Models of Missions in South Africa: The Apostolic Faith Mission and the Assemblies of God,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8, no. 1 (Ja) (2005): 146.

<sup>281</sup> Clark, “Two Contrasting Models of Missions in South Africa,” 147.

That blacks were allowed to be and provide such significant leadership was in itself quite foreign during this time in South African history.

Yet, although the AOG was organized in a way that allowed for both black and white leadership and did not *officially* segregate itself, it too became *practically* segregated. Two of the most prominent AOG leaders were James Mullan in the white churches and Nicholas Bhengu in the black churches. Mullan and Bhengu had a sort of “Peter-Paul arrangement”, whereby Mullan would concern himself with the white churches of the AOG and Bhengu with the black churches.<sup>282</sup> “...Bhengu was insistent that local White churches should not become involved in any way in evangelization of Black people.”<sup>283</sup> The result was that, although the AOG was officially non-segregated, at the most basic, grass-roots level it was indeed quite segregated.<sup>284</sup>

Ironically, although the AOG initially reflected the more liberal values of its expatriate heritage,<sup>285</sup> especially with regards to the issue of race as the early missionaries’ primary concern was for their love and compassion for Africans,<sup>286</sup> the way in which the AOG developed became the very embodiment of apartheid ideology. It was argued, for example, that the creation of such separation protected the smaller White churches from Black numerical domination as well as allowing for the development of self-confident Black leadership (i.e., an ideal example of “separate development”).<sup>287</sup> These arguments “were often used by Afrikaner nationalists to support the establishment of Black independent homelands, equal-but-separate, the very cornerstone of apartheid doctrine!”<sup>288</sup>

What’s more is that the AOG embraced, like other Pentecostal churches, what it deemed to be an apolitical stance.<sup>289</sup> Pentecostals sought to embrace and embody

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<sup>282</sup> Clark, "Two Contrasting Models of Missions in South Africa," 151.

<sup>283</sup> Clark, "Two Contrasting Models of Missions in South Africa," 151.

<sup>284</sup> Clark, "Two Contrasting Models of Missions in South Africa," 151.

<sup>285</sup> Clark, "Two Contrasting Models of Missions in South Africa," 151-52.

<sup>286</sup> Clark, "Two Contrasting Models of Missions in South Africa," 153.

<sup>287</sup> Clark, "Two Contrasting Models of Missions in South Africa," 154.

<sup>288</sup> Clark, "Two Contrasting Models of Missions in South Africa," 155.

<sup>289</sup> Although Matthew Clark suggests that Nicholas Bhengu also embodied the typical apolitical stance, arguing how Bhengu resisted, until his death, the call to political activism, despite the oppression that he and other Blacks faced during apartheid (Ibid., 155-56), Anthony Balcomb offers a more holistic view. Balcomb also recognizes the way Bhengu “eschewed direct political involvement,” but argues that his social concern clearly had an impact on the political sphere. See Anthony Balcomb, "Nicholas Bhengu - the Impact of an African Pentecostal on South African Society," *Exchange* 34, no. 4 (2005).

what has become its traditional apolitical stance where any involvement in politics is considered sinful. Within South Africa, this understanding led to an understanding where “[a]t best, individuals who engaged in the struggle had to resign from pastoral church ministry. At worst, those who participated in the struggle were considered ‘backslidden’.”<sup>290</sup> Indeed, it was this understanding that led the AFM to suspend Frank Chikane, one of South Africa’s most prominent Pentecostal figures and a minister in the black AFM, from “full-time service” because of his involvement in the struggle against apartheid. He was only reinstated in 1990.<sup>291</sup> Anderson punctuates the assumption: “Ordained AFM ministers were supposed to reject participation in political activities.”<sup>292</sup> And participating in the struggle against apartheid was considered to be a political activity. Justus Du Plessis, an AFM pastor, argued in 1975 that “The Church as a corporate body should never be involved in political activity and should not be alliance to any political party.”<sup>293</sup>

The irony, of course, is that “political activity” was only viewed as such when one struggled against the way in which society was structured – that which benefited white society. Chikane was deemed “political” because of his involvement in the struggle against apartheid. And yet, in one of the instances where he was detained, he was questioned and tortured by a deacon in the white church of his own denomination. This was not understood as “political.”

The Afrikanerization thrust that peaked in South Africa in the 1940s could also be found in the Pentecostal church. Justus Du Plessis wrote a letter to advocate J. G. Strijdom in 1950 where he openly states “‘Vandag, dank God is die AGS ‘n suiwer Afrikaanse Kerk’ (Thank God, today the AFM is a pure Afrikaans church).”<sup>294</sup> Another example is Gerrie Wessels who, being the vice-president of the AFM church until 1969, was also a National Party senator in 1955.<sup>295</sup> Wessels’ election sparked a heated debate with regards to AFM’s policy that a full-time worker (i.e., an ordained minister) could not be actively involved in party politics. This issue was debated thoroughly at the 1956 White Workers Council. Eventually the statement which read

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<sup>290</sup> Clark, "Two Contrasting Models of Missions in South Africa," 160.

<sup>291</sup> Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh*, 65.

<sup>292</sup> Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh*, 65.

<sup>293</sup> Allan Anderson, "Pentecostals and Apartheid in South Africa During Ninety Years 1908-1998," *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* February, no. 9 (2001): 11.

<sup>294</sup> Anderson, "Pentecostals and Apartheid in South Africa During Ninety Years 1908-1998," 11.

<sup>295</sup> Lapoorta, "The Necessity for a Relevant Pentecostal Witness in South Africa," 27.

that “no full-time worker should be actively involved in party politics, and should he wish to do so, he must retire” was eventually amended to: “... that no full-time worker should be actively involved in party political affairs and neither should he serve on any political body, except when the spiritual committee deemed it to be in the interest of the Kingdom of God and of the Church of Christ. That the Executive Council also determines the status of any such full-time worker.”<sup>296</sup>

Furthermore, the AFM regularly invited members of the National Party to address their Worker’s Conferences. This was a regular practice until 1986.<sup>297</sup> Lapoorta notes that the worst of all these addresses was when the Minister of Defence visited their conference, which was also televised. This prompted the General Secretary of the “Coloured” AFM Church to assert: “this uncritical association of the white church with the Nationalist Party politicians has caused incalculable damage and embarrassment to the churches in the black community.”<sup>298</sup>

Given all that we have noted we can see how white Pentecostals, even in their stated desire to be and remain apolitical, participated—sometimes overtly, but most often in simply being willing to remain benefactors of the status quo—in the political life of South Africa and the apartheid system. This was due largely as a result of a very narrow understanding as to the meaning of “politics” as well as the social or “public” implications of the Christian faith. The result was an all-too-willing attitude to accept the way things were and even maintain the status quo that apartheid provided as they benefited from the way society was structured. Anderson summarizes it well:

White-controlled Pentecostal denominations were at least sympathetic to the government that guaranteed their continued dominance and privilege. The oppression of the majority of South Africans in this political system went unnoticed and participation in politics (other than in the politics of the White government) was ‘sinful’. The *swart gevaar* (‘Black danger’) was thought to be everywhere present. African nationalism and Black political aspirations were ‘Communist’ inspired, evil invisible forces, and therefore part of the ‘Antichrist’ system that would destroy ‘genuine’ Christianity. The glaring structural sin of the apartheid system was unrecognized, and those Christians who dared speak against it were at best ‘liberals’, but more often were declared to be dangerous, Communist-inspired proponents of

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<sup>296</sup> Isak Schalk van der Merwe Burger, *Die Geskiedenis Van Die Apostoliese Geloof Sending Van Suid-Afrika, 1908-1958* (Pretoria, South Africa: Universiteit van Pretoria, 1987), 329. Referred to in Lapoorta, “The Necessity for a Relevant Pentecostal Witness in South Africa,” 28.

<sup>297</sup> Lapoorta, “The Necessity for a Relevant Pentecostal Witness in South Africa,” 28.

<sup>298</sup> Anderson, “Pentecostals and Apartheid in South Africa During Ninety Years 1908-1998,” 3.

‘liberation theology’, another anti-Christian ideology that amounted to the seduction of ‘biblical’ Christianity by evil forces. This was the prevalent view, and most White Pentecostals preferred the status quo.<sup>299</sup>

## The National Initiative for Reconciliation

In 1985, in response to the State of Emergencies which the apartheid government declared in its attempt to stem the increased pressure – the onslaught – against its rule, African Enterprise (AE) spearheaded the National Initiative for Reconciliation (NIR). The hope of the NIR was to affect the way in which South Africans thought, recognizing that the trajectory in which South Africa was heading would result in ongoing—and increased—bloodshed as the majority of people in South Africa continued to struggle for their liberation. Although most of the activities initiated by the NIR occurred *after* the publication of the KD, AE initiated the discussion for the NIR and its expressed intent just weeks before the publication of the KD. The NIR could also have been one of the catalysts for the KD depiction of “Church Theology”. It is worth exploring whether—and if so, how—the NIR embodied the KD concern regarding “Church Theology”.

The idea for the NIR emerged as Michael Cassidy, the founder of AE and the one who initiated the idea of the NIR, commented in an interview with *Third Way Magazine* in 1989, that “In 1985 a number of us in South Africa came to the conclusion that what we were watching, between blacks and whites and between different political groups, was like a marriage heading towards irretrievable breakdown.”<sup>300</sup> The NIR, therefore, was an initiative that sought to transcend the conflict which was in full swing in the 1980s, trying to imagine a new and different way forward—a third way—that sought a future whereby blacks and whites could be reconciled and be a manifestation of one common humanity.

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<sup>299</sup> Anderson, “Pentecostals and Apartheid in South Africa During Ninety Years 1908-1998,” 4.

<sup>300</sup> “Slow Progress with S Africa's National Initiative for Reconciliation,” *Third Way*, January 1989, 11.

South Africa has been controlled by two emotions: white fear and black anger.<sup>301</sup> Although he does not suggest why blacks would be angry, and therefore why whites would be driven by fear, Cassidy noted that the church has fallen into this political backdrop which has infected relational and socio-political dynamics. “Not only have we had to contend with the universally pervasive differences in the church of theology, worship, spirituality, biblical understanding and ecclesiastical practice, but we have also had to contend with racism and its alienating consequences right in the very bowels of the church itself.”<sup>302</sup> This reality, argued Cassidy, affects the very capacity for the church to participate in mission and evangelism.<sup>303</sup> Cassidy, in reflecting on a city-wide evangelistic outreach that took place in Pretoria sometime in the early 1980s (although Cassidy does not provide the exact date), noted that in the course of deliberations among the wider group of Christian leaders, they began to struggle and grapple with the political and racial issues that confronted them. And “before we knew where we were the whole mission had fallen through the woodwork and come to naught. I believe there were tears in heaven and laughter in hell at this debacle.”<sup>304</sup>

Cassidy argued that South Africa needs an alternative model in the midst of such a polarized society, one that comes together despite its racial and religious diversity.

Clearly if South Africa is to be healed and saved reconciliation is the compelling priority of the hour. But manifestly it cannot be cheap or based on anything other than profound political repentance from the whites and costly political forgiveness from the blacks. Whites have to grasp that reconciliation without a new order of justice and equity for all is impossible, and blacks, naturally tempted to the mechanisms of vendetta or violence, need to see the politics of forgiveness as the ultimate biblical and political realism if the nation is to find any long-term salvation.<sup>305</sup>

What we can already see in the quote above, Cassidy reflects the white to dictate what blacks must do (i.e., offer forgiveness) without acknowledging the

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<sup>301</sup> Michael Cassidy, "The National Initiative for Reconciliation," in *The Cost of Reconciliation in South Africa*, ed. Klaus Nürnberger and John Tooke, Nir Reader (Cape Town, South Africa: Methodist Publishing House, 1988), 65.

<sup>302</sup> Cassidy, "The National Initiative for Reconciliation," 65.

<sup>303</sup> Cassidy, "The National Initiative for Reconciliation," 65. Although we will focus on this in more depth later, we can already see the assumption that the political and the racial are two aspects that are foreign and separate from Cassidy's understanding of Christian outreach and the Christian message, thus demonstrating the apolitical understanding of Christianity itself.

<sup>304</sup> Cassidy, "The National Initiative for Reconciliation," 67.

<sup>305</sup> Cassidy, "The National Initiative for Reconciliation," 68-69.

difficulty of embodying such actions given the history of oppression and injustice, especially if there was little to no change in their circumstances. “When the world sees the relational impossibles together in Christ it makes the Gospel credible. The demonstration of a reconciled community paves the way for mission and evangelism.”<sup>306</sup> The church, argued Cassidy, is the only entity that spans the divide from the extreme right to the far left, must find ways of coming together, building relationships that cross the chasm and counter-act the ideology that has taken root in both the desire to maintain the system of apartheid and the unjust ways society is structured under apartheid, as well as the forces that struggle against apartheid.

Anthony Balcomb helps to understand some of the NIR’s logic as well as pitfalls. Balcomb demonstrates how Cassidy’s goal was to step out of the binary conflict surrounding apartheid and develop an alternative theological paradigm that counter-acted other forms of theology that served as justification for other, more militant activities and violence. Such justification was found in both sides of the conflict: on the one side, there was a theology that perpetuated and justified a violent and repressive peace; on the other was a theology that justified violent and destructive revolution. The NIR sought an alternative way – a third way, thus Balcomb’s depiction of “third way theology – that pursued peace and reconciliation. It sought to neither legitimate revolution or repression.”<sup>307</sup>

According to Balcomb, proponents of third way theology were primarily concerned in maintaining the essence, character, and identity of the Christian church. The fear being that the church was being coopted by both the left and the right.<sup>308</sup>

A theology of liberation was merely the “mirror image” of a theology of the status quo. This meant that these theologies had lost their distinctively Christian character and were therefore, at best, misguided versions of the truth and, at worst, perverted versions of the truth. The third way offered a transcendent solution to the problem by asserting that its advocates were “not influenced by any... political agenda”, had an “ideological freedom which does not project any particular economic or political solution for South Africa”, and had “no purpose... either to preserve the status quo or enhance revolutionary objectives”.<sup>309</sup>

The conflicts of the world, it was believed, had no place within the being of the church. The church, when allowed to be the church, would overcome the differences

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<sup>306</sup> Cassidy, "The National Initiative for Reconciliation," 71.

<sup>307</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 63.

<sup>308</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 66.

<sup>309</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 63.



that are projected onto it in its quest for an objective, transcendent, and apolitical truth. The cure third way theologians offered to the political struggle taking place within South Africa was for the church to become a distinctive community that could be discernable from all political solutions.<sup>310</sup> The values third way theology offered in allowing “the church to be the church” were transcendence, critical distance, and uniqueness.

A church located in a transcendent gospel will be a church preserved from the ideologies in which political movements are entrapped. Transcendence will enable the church to maintain a critical distance from these movements and thus to fulfill its unique and prophetic function in society. Once the church loses these it loses its identity. Once it loses its identity it loses its meaning for existence.<sup>311</sup>

Reconciliation was therefore the key that differences could be overcome. If the church could embody such reconciliation, it would be able to demonstrate reconciliation between people of different political ambitions, racial and cultural backgrounds, and class distinctions.<sup>312</sup> Reconciliation was an answer to social harmony over against conflict and violence.<sup>313</sup> “Conflict,” noted Balcomb, was “perceived to be basically inimical to the gospel of peace.”<sup>314</sup>

And yet, the NIR struggled because it was unable to transcend the conflicts caused by racial, political, and power dynamics of the time. Although the NIR did play an important role in “awakening” some, especially among whites, to the social realities that existed during apartheid (i.e., the way in which apartheid created and treated the majority in order to ensure privilege for a few), the NIR struggled largely because of its key focus – reconciliation. Although reconciliation stands at the heart of biblical Christianity, it proved to be a problematic concept for both the black world as well as the white world. The notion of reconciliation became devalued in the black world largely because, as the KD and its criticism pointed out, reconciliation was “cheap”. Likewise, reconciliation became difficult for the white world. It required sacrifices that many whites were not willing to make. The “Day of Prayer” can serve as an example. The “Day of Prayer” that the NIR organized was held on a work day. This alienated the white world because of the financial and the perceived political

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<sup>310</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 66.

<sup>311</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 67.

<sup>312</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 67.

<sup>313</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 70.

<sup>314</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 70.

implications of such an event. Many whites, noted Cassidy, considered this “Day of Prayer” as “political”, not only because, for them, it smacked of a protest or a strike which obviously affects business, but also because of Desmond Tutu’s involvement—someone who most whites saw as a political figure. “Suddenly the NIR was caught, with reconciliation being lampooned on the black side as cheap and irrelevant and on the white side as ‘political’.”<sup>315</sup> Both of these depictions proved to be problematic for the NIR as it sought to transcend such depictions and the political ideologies that fueled them.

Yet, it was precisely this “Day of Prayer” that demonstrated the character of the NIR. The idea which eventually became a “Day of Prayer” was actually first suggested as a *six day* stay-away – a form of worker strike, first suggested by Desmond Tutu. Those who were in the more oppressed position in society were thus willing to use the (limited) means available to them – their labour – in order to increase the pressure on the government to push for the end of the State of Emergency in particular and the apartheid system in general. A six day stay-away would have, inevitably, put significant pressure on the white world which depended on black labour in order to keep and ensure their own privilege. Such action was interpreted as being much more confrontational, thus moving away from neutrality – the middle ground – thought necessary to “reconcile” the two conflicting sides. Whites, in other words, along with businesses, would have interpreted a *six-day* stay-away as taking a side. This would thus embody a particular form of ideology instead of remaining politically neutral.

Not surprisingly, the initial conference of the NIR became a microcosm of the existing conflict taking place in South Africa at the time.<sup>316</sup> After Tutu proposed the six-day stay-away, the organizers of the NIR recognized the potential political and economic backlash from the government and economic sectors, the backbone of white society. And it was some of the big businesses which were, ironically, helping to fund the initial stages of the NIR and its conference. Thus, the organizers and a strong contingent of white (English and Afrikaans) delegates who vigorously attempted to not only reduce the amount of time of such an action but also to “de-politicize” the event.<sup>317</sup> The result being that the strong contingent of white delegates was able to

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<sup>315</sup> "Slow Progress with S Africa's National Initiative for Reconciliation," 12.

<sup>316</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 89.

<sup>317</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 101.

force a compromise in their favour.<sup>318</sup> Rather than embarking upon a six-day stay-away, a one-day “Day of Prayer” was planned. Such a compromise, however, unfortunately demonstrated the willingness to pander to the more privileged, whereas those who were oppressed in society found themselves oppressed once again.

One of the key stumbling blocks for third way theology protagonists, notes Balcomb, especially in pursuing reconciliation, was the issue of power; an example of which is seen regarding the “Day of Prayer”. Power and power struggles were viewed as contrary to the Christian gospel.<sup>319</sup> Power is what lay behind conflicts, and thus was assumed to be contrary to the gospel of peace. “To entertain power struggle is to be consumed by it. Third way theology is therefore essentially a theology that endeavours [sic] to counteract or avoid the political power struggle.”<sup>320</sup> This means avoiding political issues or developing an approach that deals with such issues based on the distinctiveness of the church.<sup>321</sup> For “third way” theologians, therefore,

[t]he way of the cross... is the way of refusal. It refuses the demands made upon it either to completely identify with, or withdraw from, the world.... It means that it is impossible for the church to take sides either with the forces of liberation or with the forces of preservation. This refusal to take sides leads to persecution from both sides which was a further sign that the third way is the true way of the cross, refusing the way of partisan political affiliation.<sup>322</sup>

And yet, as we already noted above, in the pursuit of a middle ground that attempted to avoid the different power dynamics, a compromise that would not “take sides” already took the side of those who had more power. By seeking a politics of the middle, notes Balcomb, one will inevitably end up focusing on the more powerful party.<sup>323</sup> The oppressed, in other words, will continue to be oppressed.

The effort of avoiding the issue of power, argues Balcomb, led the NIR to embody liberalism. The NIR assumed that neutral ground, free from the power struggles taking place in the politics of South Africa during apartheid, could be achieved thereby allowing the church to demonstrate its true ecclesial character where

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<sup>318</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 106.

<sup>319</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 67.

<sup>320</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 67.

<sup>321</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 67.

<sup>322</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 73. This will be a question that we will come back to as we explore the difference between the “third way” of Church Theology from the Anabaptist third way (see chapter six).

<sup>323</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 91.

those on opposite sides of the apartheid divide could relate. Power dynamics thus first had to be removed. The question, therefore, was not how could the church be the church given such realities of power, but how could power be removed so that the church could be the church.<sup>324</sup> The NIR's guiding vision highlights this point: "The existence of a 'third race' of people, interspersed throughout the societal spectrum, free of ideological bias, transcending political differences, and committed to reconciliation and peace, would surely constitute a force to be reckoned with."<sup>325</sup> What is noteworthy, however, is that the first task necessary for the church to be able to be the church was the achievement of political neutrality. The true being of the church, it was thought, is held captive until a moderate political middle ground between the two extremes can be achieved. This, as we will see later, is problematic.

Such a political neutrality or moderate assumption was perhaps best highlighted through the writings of Klaus Nürnberger, a key protagonist of the NIR and its theology. Nürnberger assumes ideally the state provides a free and neutral ground so that its citizens, whilst competing with one another, can climb up the social ladder.<sup>326</sup> But, if this principle is to work, argues Nürnberger,

everybody must have the same chance to compete with everybody else. Politically all groups must have the same right to strive for power and influence in society. That is the principle of democracy. Economically all groups must have the same chance of producing goods which can be marketed. That is the principle of free enterprise. In other words, there must be equality of dignity and equality of opportunity.<sup>327</sup>

For Nürnberger, conflict arises not solely because there is a lack of love, but because social imbalances have come to exist. Reconciliation, therefore, given such social maladjustments, requires the restoration of such social imbalances.<sup>328</sup> The ideal liberal state must allow for the freedom of its citizens, through healthy competition, to climb the social ladder according to one's interests, gifts, and training.<sup>329</sup> In a liberal society it is not wrong to pursue one's interests. It is only wrong when such a pursuit

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<sup>324</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 98.

<sup>325</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 98.

<sup>326</sup> Klaus Nürnberger, "Costly Reconciliation: A Message to the Clergy in Port Elizabeth," in *The Cost of Reconciliation in South Africa*, ed. Klaus Nürnberger and John Tooke (Cape Town, South Africa: Methodist Publishing House, 1988), 116.

<sup>327</sup> Nürnberger, "Costly Reconciliation," 116.

<sup>328</sup> Nürnberger, "Costly Reconciliation," 115.

<sup>329</sup> Nürnberger, "Costly Reconciliation," 116.

destroys the possibility for others to compete.<sup>330</sup> Should this happen, the ones who possess the power, Nürnberger argued, must let it go so that the social balance can be restored. Reconciliation, in this situation, means that the powerful who have managed to get on top socially, have to climb down and give others a chance.<sup>331</sup>

Nürnberger's logic, however, continues the paternalism that has been all too present and persistent in the South Africa throughout its history. His logic in how to restore social balance assumes that it is the responsibility of those "at the top" to help "those at the bottom" get back onto their feet.<sup>332</sup> "Only when you have, can you give; only when you are up, can you move down."<sup>333</sup> For Nürnberger, in other words, restoration, and therefore reconciliation, can only occur when leaders and those with power in society decide to make such changes. It assumes a top-down approach to change. This assumption smacks of paternalism.

In another article, Nürnberger noted that "full restitution" would not be realistic. "In many cases full restitution would harm the society to such an extent that it is in the interest even of the wronged party to make a fresh start and bury the past."<sup>334</sup> Thus, a sense of realism becomes the key concept through which reconciliation and social transformation are to be implemented. One can conclude, therefore, that if "reconciliation" and "social transformation" are unrealistic, as Nürnberger suggested, given the realities of the context, such concepts end up being no threat to those in positions of privilege. "Being in possession of over 90% of the professional expertise in all spheres of life they [whites] have no reason to fear that they would be ploughed under."<sup>335</sup> And again, "[t]here have been many wise elites in history who recognized that to yield now is better than to be pushed from the throne later."<sup>336</sup>

A paradox exists in Nürnberger argument. He recognizes the need for radical social transformation in order to restore what has become socially imbalanced. Such change, however, would (could) only be brought about by those "at the top" of society – by those in power. And given the propensity for those "at the top" to *not* share the

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<sup>330</sup> Nürnberger, "Costly Reconciliation," 116.

<sup>331</sup> Nürnberger, "Costly Reconciliation," 117.

<sup>332</sup> Nürnberger, "Costly Reconciliation," 118.

<sup>333</sup> Nürnberger, "Costly Reconciliation," 118.

<sup>334</sup> Klaus Nürnberger, "Clarifying Our Concepts," in *Conflict and the Quest for Justice*, ed. Klaus Nürnberger, 13.

<sup>335</sup> Nürnberger, "Costly Reconciliation," 122.

<sup>336</sup> Nürnberger, "Costly Reconciliation," 123.

power, wealth, and privilege they possess, Nürnberger already recognized how such restoration and transformation are not realistic, providing excuses for why drastic change would not happen. This highlights the tension of his argument and the paternalism that oppressed peoples had to deal with – more excuses why society cannot fully change, thus maintaining the conditions – the status quo – of oppression and suffering for black South Africans. These were the promises and the excuses black South Africans heard and experienced over and over throughout the centuries.

Unfortunately, this highlights how the NIR was an initiative by and for those who had the privilege to seek a neutral, middle or transcendent ground. The NIR ended up being a white initiative that did “awaken” some within the white church to the injustices and oppression that took place through apartheid and its system. But it ultimately spoke to white problems and concerns. The second NIR Reader, *Conflict and the quest for Justice*, recognizes that this had become the case. It states:

Once again we are painfully aware of the fact that most contributions have been written by Whites. We have avoided tokenism deliberately. It is one of the anomalies of the situation that over 90% of all professionals in South Africa are White. The energies of the relatively small number of qualified Blacks are seriously overstretched. Moreover, they prefer to concentrate on their own more determined initiatives, rather than White moderate ventures.<sup>337</sup>

Several key elements from the above statement must be highlighted which again provides a glimpse into the character and assumption within the NIR. First, it is made clear that the contributions “that count” are those who are “qualified” and who are “professionals”. The contributions of an average black person’s experience with the injustice brought about by apartheid are somehow insufficient. Change, the NIR assumed, would be made through the influence of leaders – economic, governmental, and ecclesial – those who it considered to be “qualified” and “professional”; those who, in short, “count”. Secondly, it recognizes that “Blacks” are overstretched and “prefer to concentrate on their own more determined initiatives.” The NIR acknowledges that it was not, nor was it viewed as, a “black” initiative.

The third element, which is most revealing, is the admission that the reader the NIR provided is a “White moderate venture.” Again this highlights the liberal ideological nature of the NIR and its quest for a middle, “moderate” ground in the

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<sup>337</sup> Klaus Nürnberger, John Tooke, and William Domeris, eds., *Conflict and the Quest for Justice*, NIR Reader No. 2 (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Encounter Publications, 1989), 2.

conflict. This demonstrates, however, the privilege and the social location whites had where they could search for such a middle ground, whereas blacks did not – could not – enjoy such privilege as they were inevitably caught within the conflict. This serves to demonstrate the way in which whites believed they were not necessarily part of the ongoing conflict and could choose to remain outside of it (i.e., be apolitical). The search for the illusive middle ground was a search to transcend the ongoing conflict. This, however, highlights the way in which whites, even those who had become awakened to the social problem of apartheid, still did not (perhaps could not) understand themselves to be part of or benefactors of an unjust system.

Through this brief analysis of the NIR we can see how it embodied several traits and characteristics. Again Balcomb's case study of the NIR assists us in this endeavor. One characteristic was its attempt to de-politicize itself, its work, and the church in general. The NIR's operating assumption was that the political ideologies and their biases would negatively distort the church's views and identity, especially when the church existed on both sides of the political divide.

A second characteristic was that in order to avoid what it perceived as a political pitfall, the problem of apartheid was converted into a spiritual problem – a problem that required spiritual and individual exercises to resolve; not political, economic, or social. The physical and the spiritual were separated. Louise Kretzschmar's analysis regarding the nature of a privatised faith, namely to create dualisms, once again rings true. In this case, not only were the physical and spiritual separated, but this move reinforced the sense that for those who were suffering from the political and social impact of the problem, the oppressor was too far removed from the situation of the oppressed to be able to empathize with or do anything constructive about their liberation.<sup>338</sup> What's more, "[t]he belief in the essential freedom of the NIR from ideological commitments was therefore the cornerstone of its agenda for reconciliation."<sup>339</sup> Reconciliation was portrayed as a form of spiritual exercise rather than a form of political and/or social process.

A third characteristic was the way in which power was enacted. Proponents of "third way theology" viewed power negatively and with skepticism; thus the pursuit of neutrality. And yet, power is an inevitable and inescapable element that affects the way in which can and will relate to one another. Thus, inevitably the NIR enacted a

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<sup>338</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 112.

<sup>339</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 88.

particular form of power. But, because it did not want to actively engage the question as to what form of power it wanted to embody, it enacted a top—down power structure.<sup>340</sup> For example, the NIR described its intent of mobilizing an ecclesial network in order to “impact the situation” (e.g., in business and politics).<sup>341</sup> The assumption, in other words, was that change and “solutions”, once determined by leaders (i.e., church leaders, political leaders, business leaders, and so forth), would be implemented in order to impact the situation through their enforcement. Put simply, the NIR enacted a form of power based on force.<sup>342</sup>

A fourth characteristic was the NIR becoming entangled with the power of the oppressor. “If you seek a politics of the middle,” notes Balcomb, “you will inevitably end up focusing on the more powerful party.”<sup>343</sup> “While it is not true to say that the NIR ignored the need for justice..., when it came to the actual dynamics of power struggle it demonstrated that its lot fell not to the side with the most claim to justice but to the side with the most hold on power.”<sup>344</sup>

A final characteristic is that an analysis that proceeds from the depiction that involvement means participating in either “violent” peace or “violent” revolution does not leave room for the possibility to participate in some form of non-violent peace or non-violent revolution.<sup>345</sup>

Balcomb thus concludes:

... [T]he third way of the NIR was a profoundly political process with political aims and political strategies. It operated from a centrist ideological framework and exercised the political options of the middle. It believed and practiced a politics of ‘reform from the top’ in which liberal capital, in concert with government, attempted to ensure peaceful change towards an ‘open’ society with a free enterprise economic system. To accomplish this it is essential to coopt elements both from the left and the right of the political spectrum. This requires political processes of negotiation, dialogue and compromise.<sup>346</sup>

The pursuit of a third way in South Africa, which was the hope of the NIR, became a search for an ideologically neutral, “moderate”, apolitical middle ground in

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<sup>340</sup> More will be said about this later. Cf. chapters five and six.

<sup>341</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 84.

<sup>342</sup> See the analysis of power offered in chapter five and an alternative understanding regarding power in chapter six.

<sup>343</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 91.

<sup>344</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 115.

<sup>345</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 95.

<sup>346</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 91.



the midst of an ever increasing conflict between a violent repression and a violent revolution. Balcomb notes that third way theology had several underlying sources: liberalism, Anabaptism, and Christian realism. This form of theology, as Balcomb demonstrated through his case study of the NIR, played out in a particular partisan way in the South African social context. Rather than being able to fulfill its apolitical desire it reinforced a form of politics that favoured a particular constituency in society. Likewise, as it resonated with the rhetoric of Christian realism, it demonstrated an ethic that sought to be pragmatic which inevitably found it siding with the powerful. *The enactment of third way theology ended up with liberal ideologies, couched in Anabaptist concepts, embracing an ethic based on Christian realism.*

The NIR and its example is set apart from the earlier examples of the Baptist Union and the Pentecostal churches. It sought to be socially engaged in providing an alternative approach that sought to transcend the conflict raging between those who sought to maintain apartheid and those who sought to overthrow it. In doing so it continued to reinforce the oppressive status quo. This helps to understand the KD's criticism of "Church Theology" and "reconciliation."

### *A Critique from within*

During the latter years of apartheid rule a growing number, albeit still a vast minority, of evangelicals became more and more vocal against the injustice of the apartheid system. Although practically the same concern could have been, and was, raised against many of the members of the so-called English speaking mainline churches, evangelicals became the target of the KD criticism of "Church Theology".

It is therefore important to acknowledge that evangelicals themselves raised similar concerns as that by the KD regarding the typical evangelical position during apartheid. The "Concerned Evangelicals" (CE) emerged shortly after the emergence of the KD and produced a document called the Evangelical Witness in South Africa (EWISA) in 1986. Then, in 1988, another group of Pentecostals, mainly motivated by Lapoorta, produced a similar document, this time specifically from a Pentecostal point

of view, called the Relevant Pentecostal Witness (RPW). Both of these documents targeted the evangelical position and assumptions by evangelicals themselves.

In many ways the arguments brought forward by the CE were similar to those expressed through the KD. EWISA also expressed its concern about the way in which concepts such as “reconciliation,” “justice,” and “peace,” were understood – a way in which these concepts are used to speak against the overt violence taking place, usually in reference to the reactionary violence against the apartheid government, but which failed to recognize the systemic violence that apartheid itself embodies. If true peace is sought, argued the CE, then there must be pursuit of justice. “Stopping people from fighting is not the solution to the problem, but facing the questions of justice and injustice is the only way to produce real peace.”<sup>347</sup> And the pursuit of justice will only come about when sin is eradicated in society.<sup>348</sup> Reconciliation, they argued, will only come about when the sin of apartheid, the cause of the conflict itself, is acknowledged and people actively pursue the eradication of this sin. Repentance and forgiveness are essential components if reconciliation is to come about. Yet, evangelicals have largely, argued the CE, accepted certain assumptions which pertain to their view of the Bible, the meaning and essence of Christianity itself, as well as life in relation to the state. Most evangelicals, they note, adhere to Luther’s notion of two kingdoms – the secular order and the spiritual order.<sup>349</sup> The assumption is that the church is responsible for the spiritual order, whereas the state is responsible for the secular order.<sup>350</sup> The RPW notes how salvation is often viewed as a personal affair between the individual and God.<sup>351</sup> The way in which many evangelicals understood salvation did not take into account the social realities that existed. This separation has led to an adherence to the order prescribed by the state and conformity to this given order.

The conformity to the social order established through colonialism and maintained through apartheid led most evangelicals to be suspicious of any notion that raised the possibility of changing such an established order. Suspicion was raised

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<sup>347</sup> Concerned Evangelicals, “Evangelical Witness in South Africa (1986),” in *The Kairos Documents*, ed. Gary S. D. Leonard (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research, 2011), 79.

<sup>348</sup> Evangelicals, “EWISA,” 79.

<sup>349</sup> Evangelicals, “EWISA,” 79.

<sup>350</sup> And here we should once again be hearing Louise Kretzschmar’s criticism with regards to the created dualism of a privatized faith.

<sup>351</sup> Relevant Pentecostal Witness, “Relevant Pentecostal Witness (1988),” in *The Kairos Documents*, ed. Gary S. D. Leonard (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research, 2011), 104.

when any form of theology or practice concerned itself with social concerns, or with any perceived openness towards communism or at least away from capitalism, or if there was any move away from the perceived “Christian” culture and society. As EWISA put it, “[w]inning souls to capitalism has become equal to winning souls for Christ; to them the West represents the Church and the East represents the mission field.”<sup>352</sup> The RPW put it this way: “We [Pentecostals] have failed to acknowledge that the social conditions in the oppressed communities are a direct result of the social conditions in the affluent white communities.”<sup>353</sup>

The above logic highlights the way in which apartheid was supported, even with its flaws, as it was perceived to be the system that sought a “Christian” future and social order. EWISA, and later the RPW, proved to be lone evangelical voices, especially for when they were written (1986 and 1988 respectively), that was willing to question not only apartheid itself, but the Christianity in which apartheid was built on.

We are distressed when we notice that these groups [evangelical groups] are ready supporters of apartheid and its apartheid officials. Some Christian (born-again) soldiers get involved in South African Defence Force shootings in our townships, and give testimonies of Christ-inspired victory over “communists” during church services. We regret their claim to the same faith as us, their prey! Some even prophesy that God is on the side of white racist South Africa, giving them a message of hope for victory against blacks in this country.<sup>354</sup>

The RPW acknowledged that one of the significant issues among Pentecostals (and perhaps for evangelicals in general) for not challenging the status quo during apartheid was that it was both highly spiritual and preoccupied with heaven. “A person was seen as having a body, a soul and a spirit, and the greatest appeal was made to the soul. The social, political and economic conditions did not matter; what mattered was that the soul be saved.”<sup>355</sup> Thus, the goal and purpose of the Christian life was not to concern itself with the world and what was happening in the world, but to concern oneself with heaven as one’s ultimate goal.

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<sup>352</sup> Concerned Evangelicals, “Evangelical Witness in South Africa (1986),” 89.

<sup>353</sup> Relevant Pentecostal Witness, “Relevant Pentecostal Witness (1988),” 105.

<sup>354</sup> Concerned Evangelicals, “Evangelical Witness in South Africa (1986),” 92.

<sup>355</sup> Relevant Pentecostal Witness, “Relevant Pentecostal Witness (1988),” 107.

Contrary to this line of reasoning, EWISA argued that evangelicals must realize that a call to repentance, a basic cornerstone of an evangelical faith, is simultaneously a call to radical change, both personally and socially.<sup>356</sup>

The problem with us (evangelicals) is that we became very radical and uncompromising against a well-selected set of sins while ignoring the rest for reasons that are not clear to many. We preach vociferously against adultery, fornication, drunkenness, thieves, robbers, hatred but are completely silent about the sin of discrimination and the sin of apartheid.... It is clear, therefore, that our radicalism is selective radicalism. When one goes through the sins emphasized and those which are de-emphasized, one can see a particular class bias. The obvious drunkards, thieves and robbers are members of a particular class of people that is likely to be oppressed, deprived, underpaid, etc., while the sins that are not emphasized are the sins of the rich, the oppressors, the exploiters, etc. There is therefore a definite bias in our sermons and message of salvation which is directed mainly at blacks rather than whites.<sup>357</sup>

## *Conclusion*

The KD's inclusion of a critique against "Church Theology" was novel. By 1985, critiques against "State Theology" were already quite common. This was not, however, the case against those who sought to remain "outside" of what was seen as a political struggle. Indeed, the idea that one could somehow remain neutral or "outside" of the conflict raging in apartheid South Africa, especially during the 1980s, was itself an indication of one's social location. Blacks, for example, did not have such privilege of being "outside" of the given conflict.

This chapter has attempted to better understand not just the KD's critique of what it described as "Church Theology", but how such a criticism could emerge in the first place. The intent was not to dissect and analyze whether the cry of the oppressed was ultimately flawed or correct. The desire was, rather, to try to understand the reason for the cry. This chapter highlights how, even if some were not officially backing apartheid and its policies, their unwillingness to challenge apartheid in practice or theologically allowed – and at times participated in – the status quo of injustice and oppression to continue. In this way, Christians turned their backs on fellow Christians. Furthermore, the choice to get involved or not is itself an option that only the privileged had the luxury of having. Thus this chapter helps us better

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<sup>356</sup> Concerned Evangelicals, "Evangelical Witness in South Africa (1986)," 94.

<sup>357</sup> Concerned Evangelicals, "Evangelical Witness in South Africa (1986)," 94-95.

understand how the desire to be neutral and apolitical exacerbated the situation while fueling the cry of those who did not have the luxury of choosing whether to be part of the conflict of apartheid. This ultimately provided the rationale for the KD's critique against "Church Theology".

3.

## Prophetic Theology in South Africa

As the *Kairos Document* critiqued and challenged “State Theology” and “Church Theology” it then provided its own alternative, what it described as “Prophetic Theology”. This theology challenged the Church and everyone who professed to be Christian, calling them to become involved in the struggle for liberation from the violence and oppression of apartheid. Rather than continuing to be complicit with apartheid and its system, either explicitly (“State Theology”) or implicitly (“Church Theology”), “Prophetic Theology” challenged the Church in South Africa to be active, albeit in a thoughtful way, in the struggle against apartheid.

This chapter will explore and seek to better understand the KD’s depiction of “Prophetic Theology”. It will also demonstrate that the call for a “Prophetic Theology” emerged out of a larger prophetic movement that had existed in the South African context. This will help us to better understand how the KD proved to be yet another expression of such a movement in the South African context.

Given the scope of this history, and the limitations of this dissertation, we will need to be satisfied with a brief overview of some of the examples of Prophetic Theology in the South African context as it challenged the status quo of a particular time. We will look at the missionary movement, the emergence of the African Independent or Initiated Churches and the Ethiopian Churches, the life and witness of the Christian Institute, the emergence of Black Consciousness and Black Theology, and finally the witness of the Institute for Contextual Theology, which helped to produce the KD itself. Through this brief historical exploration we will see how Prophetic Theology in South Africa embodied an alternative form of Christian witness, which ultimately challenged the principalities and powers that sought to be maintain the status quo of the day that oppressed and repressed the majority of South Africans. This chapter suggests that the embodiment of this alternative witness as a

theological expression gave Prophetic Theology its meaning, integrity, and authenticity. Indeed, it is precisely because of its lived embodiment that such a theology was deemed to be subversive and dangerous to the principalities and powers of the day as it gave expression to an alternative political reality. This brief review will help us better understand what then occurs to this theological perspective after the demise of apartheid in 1994.

This chapter will differ from previous chapters. The desire in previous chapters was not to analyze the validity or theological accuracy of the KD's criticism but rather to try to understand why such a criticism would emerge. This chapter, however, will analyze the KD's constructive proposal to see whether its proposition differs from the theologies it has critiqued. This will help us better understand the KD's political theology, which will also allow us to better understand the political theology of the post-apartheid context as well.

### *The Kairos Document's argument for a Prophetic Theology*

In response to the other forms of theology, the KD offered its proposal for a theology that addresses the time, the *kairos*, which South Africa faced. Ultimately, the South African context required a theology and a church that was prophetic; a theology and a church that did not sit on the fence but that clearly and unambiguously took a stand against apartheid's unjust and oppressive system.<sup>358</sup> This section will offer a summary of the KD's argument for a Prophetic Theology.

#### Social Analysis

Most importantly, the KD argues that the other forms of theology ("State Theology" and "Church Theology") lack a robust analysis of the times – the *kairos* – and the conflict in which South Africa was embroiled. When such analysis is done, argued the KD, it becomes apparent that the South African conflict lies beyond simply being a racial war. It is a situation of oppression. "The conflict is between an

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<sup>358</sup> "The Kairos Document," 7-8.

oppressor and the oppressed. The conflict is between two irreconcilable *causes* or *interests* in which the one is just and the other is unjust.”<sup>359</sup> The conflict, the KD argued, is between those whose interest is in maintaining the status quo, as they benefit directly from the way things are, and those who do not benefit from the system and who are, in fact, used for the benefit of others. Those who do not benefit from the system “are treated as mere labour units, paid starvation wages, separated from their families by migratory labor, moved about like cattle and dumped in homelands to starve—and all for the benefit of a privileged minority. They have no say in the system and are supposed to be grateful for the concessions that are offered to them like crumbs.”<sup>360</sup>

Although race may have been the basic building block upon which the apartheid system was built, the reality, as the KD noted, goes far beyond a simple conflict between race to a much larger problematic reality – a reality in which a system maintains the privilege of a few on the backs of others. If justice is to be sought for all, argued the KD, this fundamental issue of oppression must be challenged and altered.

## Oppression in the Bible

In highlighting the broader issue of oppression during apartheid, the KD explored how the Bible and therefore the Christian life deal with such issues. It noted that oppression is a central theme that runs through both the Old and New Testaments.<sup>361</sup>

...[T]he Bible describes all oppression as the experience of being crushed, degraded, humiliated, exploited, impoverished, defrauded, deceived and enslaved. And the oppressors are described as cruel, ruthless, arrogant, greedy, violent and tyrannical and as the enemy. Such descriptions could only have been written originally by people who have had a long and painful experience of what it means to be oppressed.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> "The Kairos Document," 23.

<sup>360</sup> "The Kairos Document," 23.

<sup>361</sup> "The Kairos Document," 24.

<sup>362</sup> "The Kairos Document," 24.



The story of Israel was built upon the experience of oppression as slaves in Egypt. Indeed, their notion of God, or Yahweh, was built around this experience. “God revealed himself as Yahweh, the one who has compassion on those who suffer and who liberates them from their oppressors.”<sup>363</sup>

This characteristic of God as liberator of the oppressed appears throughout the Bible.<sup>364</sup> As such, the KD noted, God is not neutral. He does not attempt to reconcile Moses and Pharaoh, Israel with their capturers, or the Jewish people with their oppressors. “Oppression,” it argued, “is sin and it cannot be compromised with, it must be done away with. God takes sides with the oppressed.”<sup>365</sup>

Likewise, Jesus, upon the start of his ministry, re-emphasizes this point – God is on the side of the poor and oppressed. To back this claim, the KD pointed to Jesus’ proclamation in Luke 4:18-19 that he has brought forth good news to the poor, proclaiming liberty to captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the downtrodden. All of this being part of Jesus proclaiming the Lord’s year of favour.<sup>366</sup> “There can be no doubt that Jesus is here taking up the cause of the poor and the oppressed. He has identified himself with their interests. Not that he is unconcerned about the rich and the oppressor. These he calls to repentance.”<sup>367</sup>

The KD concluded that South Africans know they are united with Christ in their sufferings precisely because Jesus, in his activity and solidarity with the poor and the oppressed which inevitably led to his death on the cross, became a victim of oppression and violence. Thus, the oppressed of the apartheid system can say “He is with us in our oppression.”<sup>368</sup>

## Tyranny in the Christian Tradition

In demonstrating the Biblical focus and emphasis on oppression, recognizing that it is a very real part of the biblical story and highlighting its relevance to social issues including South Africa’s, the KD’s argument shifts to demonstrate the

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<sup>363</sup> "The Kairos Document," 24.

<sup>364</sup> "The Kairos Document," 25.

<sup>365</sup> "The Kairos Document," 25.

<sup>366</sup> "The Kairos Document," 25.

<sup>367</sup> "The Kairos Document," 25.

<sup>368</sup> "The Kairos Document," 25.

tyrannical nature of the apartheid government and its system. The KD noted that the term “tyranny” is the term most often used in the Christian tradition to refer to those who oppress, create situations and systems of injustice, and participate in these forms of sinfulness.<sup>369</sup> “According to this tradition once it is established beyond doubt that a particular ruler is a tyrant or that a particular regime is tyrannical, it forfeits the moral right to govern and the people acquire the right to resist and to find the means to protect their own interests against injustice and oppression.”<sup>370</sup>

The KD turned to the Latin definition of “tyrant” to help demonstrate the implications of such a concept. It noted that “tyrant” is referred to as *hostis boni communis*, or an enemy of the common good.<sup>371</sup> It argued that the purpose of government is to promote the common good of all the people governed. This means governing in such a way that pursues the interests of all those who are governed – that which will benefit everyone.<sup>372</sup> When a government is hostile to the common good *in principle*, that is when a government has as its mandate to only pursue the interests of some, then that government has lost its legitimacy as it is hostile towards the common good – the good of all. “Such a government would be in principle *irreformable*. Any reform that it might try to introduce would not be calculated to serve the common good but to serve the interests of the minority from whom it received its mandate.”<sup>373</sup>

Tyrannical regimes, the KD argued, also tend to become more and more violent in the manner in which they rule. “The reign of a tyrant always ends up as a reign of terror. It is inevitable because from the start the tyrant is an enemy of the common good.”<sup>374</sup>

The KD’s main point is that, for the majority of people in South Africa, the apartheid government is experienced as a tyrannical regime. Indeed, they see the apartheid government as the enemy of the people, not an entity that sought the common good for all. Apartheid is a system whereby a minority of people provides an explicit mandate to the government to govern in the interests and benefit of the

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<sup>369</sup> “The Kairos Document,” 25.

<sup>370</sup> “The Kairos Document,” 25.

<sup>371</sup> “The Kairos Document,” 26.

<sup>372</sup> “The Kairos Document,” 26.

<sup>373</sup> “The Kairos Document,” 26.

<sup>374</sup> “The Kairos Document,” 26.

minority – the white community.<sup>375</sup> Such a regime cannot, therefore, be “reformed” as everyone has not been given a voice in shaping its mandate.

In speaking against the suggested proposed “reforms” of the apartheid government, the KD argued that a regime that the majority of people view as “the enemy” cannot simply begin to rule in the interests of all the people.<sup>376</sup> It can only and must be replaced by another government – “one that has been elected by the majority of the people with an explicit mandate to govern in the interests of all the people.”<sup>377</sup>

A regime that has become the enemy of the people, argued the KD, also becomes the enemy of God.<sup>378</sup> Unfortunately, many, especially those who maintain such a system, have become blinded to this. And yet recognizing and naming “the enemy” (i.e., the apartheid regime) is a positive step in that it then recognizes whom one’s enemy is thus posting the challenge in how to fulfill Jesus’ command of loving one’s enemies. Jesus’ command of loving enemies, the KD noted, recognizes that we will have enemies. It does not, however, suggest that we should not identify our enemies or that we should not name tyrannical regimes as enemies.

But once we have identified our enemies, we must endeavor to love them. That is not always easy. But then we must also remember that the most loving thing we can do for *both* the oppressed *and* for our enemies who are oppressors is to eliminate the oppression, remove the tyrants from power and establish a just government for the common good of *all the people*.<sup>379</sup>

Freeing the tyrant and the tyrannical regime of their oppressive ways is a liberating endeavor for both oppressed and oppressor.

### A Message of Hope

Ultimately, the heart of a true prophetic message, the KD argued, is a message of hope. Jesus taught us to talk about this hope as the kingdom of God. In this way, we learn to recognize that God is at work in the world, turning hopelessness and evil to good, so that God’s kingdom may come and his will be done on earth as it is in

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<sup>375</sup> "The Kairos Document," 26.

<sup>376</sup> "The Kairos Document," 27.

<sup>377</sup> "The Kairos Document," 27.

<sup>378</sup> "The Kairos Document," 27.

<sup>379</sup> "The Kairos Document," 27-28.

heaven.<sup>380</sup> This means that goodness, justice, and love for all will triumph in the end. Tyranny and oppression cannot last forever. All tears will be wiped away and the lamb will lie down with the lion. “True peace and true reconciliation,” the KD argued, “are not only desirable, they are assured and guaranteed. This is our faith and our hope.”<sup>381</sup>

Why is it that others do not highlight this message of hope? Perhaps, the KD pointed out, it is because church leaders, especially those in the “Church Theology” camp, address the oppressors rather than the oppressed.<sup>382</sup> “Is it because they do not want to encourage the oppressed to be too hopeful for too much?”<sup>383</sup>

The reality, it argued, is that many of those who are oppressed are quite hopeful precisely because they are courageously and fearlessly acting in the hope that liberation will come. In this way they are already involved in an emancipatory performance – a performance that already puts into practice, i.e., enacts, the emancipatory desire of the people.<sup>384</sup> And yet, the KD argued, this hope needs to be confirmed and spread. It must be maintained and strengthened. The people who are involved in such emancipatory performances need to hear again and again that God is with them.<sup>385</sup>

Likewise, the oppressor and those who believe and themselves enact the oppressor’s propaganda also need to hear this message of hope – a hopeful message that may at first, ironically, cause fear.

They must be made aware of the diabolical evils of the present system and they must be called to repentance but they must also be given something to hope for. At present they have false hopes. They hope to maintain the status quo and their special privileges with perhaps some adjustments and they fear any real alternative. But there is much more than that to hope for and nothing to fear.<sup>386</sup>

The KD concludes this section by stating:

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<sup>380</sup> "The Kairos Document," 28.

<sup>381</sup> "The Kairos Document," 28.

<sup>382</sup> "The Kairos Document," 28.

<sup>383</sup> "The Kairos Document," 28.

<sup>384</sup> This is similar to David O’Toole’s argument in his book *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo* where the apocalyptic hope carves a space whereby a new, hopeful, politics – the politics of God’s coming kingdom – is pursued and embodied, even in the midst of turmoil. See David Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse*, Radical Traditions (London: SCM, 2001). We will look at this in more depth in the last chapter.

<sup>385</sup> "The Kairos Document," 28.

<sup>386</sup> "The Kairos Document," 28.

There is hope. There is hope for all of us. But the road to that hope is going to be very hard and very painful. The conflict and the struggle will have to intensify in the months and years ahead because there is no other way to remove the injustice and oppression. But God is with us. We can only learn to become the instruments of *his* peace even unto death. We must participate in the cross of Christ if we are to have the hope of participating in his resurrection.<sup>387</sup>

## Challenge to Action

Ultimately, the KD's challenge to the church in becoming "prophetic" was for the church to become active in the struggle against apartheid. And being unified in struggling against the injustice of apartheid was already a significant challenge precisely because of how divided the Church had become because of apartheid itself.<sup>388</sup> "We are a divided Church precisely because not all the members of our Churches have taken sides against oppression."<sup>389</sup> Given this reality, the only way towards church unity, the KD argued, is that those who are either part of the oppressed or those "sitting on the fence" need to cross over to the other side and be with those who are oppressed. "Unity and reconciliation within the Church itself is only possible around God and Jesus Christ who are to be found on the side of the poor and the oppressed."<sup>390</sup>

The KD then suggested ways to embody solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. First, Christians must make the conscious decision to become active in the struggle for liberation and for a just society. This means participating in and supporting the different campaigns of the people (e.g., consumer boycotts, stayaways, etc.) and move away from what it described as an "ambulance ministry" – becoming engaged only during times of emergency, but ultimately remaining distant from and not involved in the ongoing struggle.<sup>391</sup>

Second, the KD challenged the Church to transform its own activities – worship services, communion services, baptisms, Sunday school, funeral services, and so forth – as these all can be opportunities to embody, demonstrate, and be consistent

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<sup>387</sup> "The Kairos Document," 28-29.

<sup>388</sup> "The Kairos Document," 31.

<sup>389</sup> "The Kairos Document," 31.

<sup>390</sup> "The Kairos Document," 31.

<sup>391</sup> "The Kairos Document," 31.

with a prophetic faith that challenges the realities of its particular context.<sup>392</sup> “The unity and sharing we profess in our communion services or Masses must be named. It is the solidarity of the people inviting all to join in the struggle for God’s peace in South Africa. The repentance we preach must be named. It is repentance for our share of the guilt for the suffering and oppression in our country.”<sup>393</sup> Unfortunately, the KD noted, the Church is losing its relevance to the poor and the oppressed precisely because the faith that it professes does not speak to their reality. For this reason the Church must transform its services and its message “to serve the real needs of all the people and to further the liberating mission of God and the Church in the world.”<sup>394</sup>

Third, the KD encouraged the Church, even if it would have the need for its own special programmes, projects, and campaigns, to avoid duplicating what other “people’s organizations” are already doing. The Church “must not confuse the issue by having programmes that run counter to the struggles of those political organisations that truly represent the grievances and demands of the people,”<sup>395</sup> thereby becoming a “third force”.

Fourth, the KD noted that the above leads the Church to participate in civil disobedience. If a regime is seen as morally illegitimate and tyrannical then the church cannot collaborate with it.<sup>396</sup> Not only does this mean not collaborating with the present tyrannical regime, the Church should also mobilize its members and parishes to think and plan for a change of government.<sup>397</sup> “We must begin to look ahead and begin working now with firm hope and faith for a better future.”<sup>398</sup> But, it warned, this will inevitably lead to times when the church will have to confront and disobey the state in order to obey God.<sup>399</sup>

Lastly, the KD argued that as people look to the Church for moral guidance it must always make its stance absolutely clear and never tire from explaining why it is taking such a stance.<sup>400</sup> “There must be no misunderstanding about the *moral duty* of

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<sup>392</sup> "The Kairos Document," 32.

<sup>393</sup> "The Kairos Document," 32.

<sup>394</sup> "The Kairos Document," 32.

<sup>395</sup> "The Kairos Document," 32.

<sup>396</sup> "The Kairos Document," 32.

<sup>397</sup> "The Kairos Document," 32-33.

<sup>398</sup> "The Kairos Document," 33.

<sup>399</sup> "The Kairos Document," 33.

<sup>400</sup> "The Kairos Document," 33.

all who are oppressed to resist oppression and to struggle for liberation and justice.”<sup>401</sup> The Church, argued the KD, must be an example in the struggle against injustice and oppression, witnessing and giving voice to the hope and confidence that oppression will not rule and that such reality will inevitably change because God is on the side of those who are suffering. Thus the challenge laid upon the Church:

The challenge of the faith and of our present KAIROS is addressed to all who bear the name Christian. None of us can simply sit back and wait to be told what to do by our Church leaders or by anyone else. We must all accept responsibility for acting and living our Christian faith in these circumstances. We pray that God will help all of us to translate the challenge of our times into action.<sup>402</sup>

### *The Historical development of a prophetic movement*

In the previous chapters we noted a significant history that highlights the development of “State Theology” and “Church Theology”. “Prophetic Theology” also has such a history. The KD and the social movement through which such a document was created did not simply appear out of nowhere. It arose, I suggest, as an expression of a theological throughout South Africa’s history as the Church wrestled with different social realities that came to exist within the South African context and the prevailing theological expressions (i.e., “State Theology” and “Church Theology”) that undergirded and justified such realities. Colonialism, race, the notion of “development”, exploitation, and the created gap between rich and poor, were all issues that arose over the centuries. Naturally this affected the Church as it emerged beyond the “settler” (white) communities. There is a rich history of the Church fulfilling its prophetic calling in South Africa given the social realities that developed which suppressed and oppressed the majority of its people. The KD itself is one more instance and expression of this prophetic movement.

Others have documented well the nature and trajectory of this “prophetic” movement.<sup>403</sup> Given such comprehensive work, I will not seek to duplicate what has

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<sup>401</sup> "The Kairos Document," 33.

<sup>402</sup> "The Kairos Document," 33.

<sup>403</sup> See, for example, John de Gruchy and Steve de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa: 25th Anniversary Edition* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2004). De Gruchy’s seminal volume has undergone four different editions precisely because of the comprehensive nature and importance of his book as well as the topic of the church’s struggle against apartheid.

already been done. This chapter will provide a brief summary of this history so that this work can be historically and contextually aware. The primary interest of this chapter is to get a sense in how this prophetic movement in South Africa embodied an alternative political reality in the midst of the colonial and later apartheid government.

### The Legacy of the Mission Church

The first chapter on “State Theology” already highlighted a distinction between “settler churches” and “mission churches”. The former being churches that were established primarily to serve the needs of white settlers in South Africa, and the latter those established for other races. Although James Cochrane is right in his critique of the missionary movement and the ways it furthered the colonization of those who were non-white, it also, whether wittingly or not, planted seeds of revolution and dissent – i.e., seeds of a prophetic witness – against the settlers, colonizers, and white society in general.

In looking specifically at the so-called English-speaking church history, James Cochrane takes a critical look at the way these churches related to, and often became brokers for, “the powers” in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although later in the century the so-called English speaking churches were often seen as the “churches in opposition” (opposition to the apartheid government and its system), Cochrane asks why, given a consistent anti-apartheid record on paper, there was a “general manifest powerlessness to translate that record into practical policy”?<sup>404</sup> Part of the problem, he notes, is that English-speaking churches often failed to be self-critical about their own place in the structures of domination and oppression in South African history.<sup>405</sup>

Cochrane then demonstrates how the English-speaking churches, in following the Dutch Reformed Church’s (DRC) example, and their missionary endeavors paved the way for Western colonialism. In speaking about the missionaries who were among the waves of invading conquerors, Cochrane says “[t]hey were inspired by a

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See also Richard Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2012). In his book, Elphick argues that the seed of egalitarianism comes from the theological proclamation of the early missionaries in South Africa. This seed of equality posed a constant challenge to white domination.

<sup>404</sup> Cochrane, *Servants of Power*, 2.

<sup>405</sup> Cochrane, *Servants of Power*, 3.



peculiarly Western, post-Enlightenment idea not only that proselytization and the zealous conversion of the entire human race was the supreme task of the Christian community, but that this goal was also culturally determined, that is, connected to the European meaning of civilisation.”<sup>406</sup> The result was the further expansion of Western society, culture, and, ultimately, its understanding of “civilization” due in large part to the missionary’s zeal.

This was made possible because of the intimate connection between Empire and Church. An example of this assumed intimate connection, which we already noted in chapter 1, is the way in which Bishop A. B. Webb, the Bishop of Grahamstown in 1897, describes the relationship between Empire and Church:

... missionary work, viewed under the light of the Eternal Purpose of God (is) the inner meaning of history,... the ‘far-off divine event to which the whole of creation moves.’  
(It is the call) as citizens of our British Empire, and as sons and daughters of our British church, to rise up, in furtherance of this end, to their truly imperial responsibility and their imperial mission and destiny.<sup>407</sup>

Cochrane also quotes the “manifestly undisguised” perspectives of John Philip who acknowledges that “Missionary stations are the most efficient agents whcih [sic] can be employed to promote the internal strength of our colonies, and the cheapest and best military posts a government can employ.”<sup>408</sup> And again, in quoting H. J. Kidd’s Gray Centenary Lecture in 1947:

Unfortunately wherever the Church went, the State, like Mary’s little lamb, was also bound to go. For the Church of England, as by law established, was subject to the Royal Supremacy. Where its bounds spread, its bonds spread also, and a Bishop beyond the seas was no less an official and a servant of the Crown in matters ecclesiastical than was a Governor in matters civil and political.<sup>409</sup>

Barney Nyameko Pityana, one of the fathers of the Black Consciousness movement, puts it as follows:

It has been alleged with truth that the trader and the settler followed the missionary, who was the agent of European imperialism, working hand in hand with the colonial powers for the subjugation of the black people and the territorial extension of the imperialist power. The coming of Christianity set in motion a process of social change

<sup>406</sup> Cochrane, *Servants of Power*, 13.

<sup>407</sup> Cochrane, *Servants of Power*, 20.

<sup>408</sup> Cochrane, *Servants of Power*, 22.

<sup>409</sup> Cochrane, *Servants of Power*, 12.

involving rapid disintegration of the tribal set-up and the framework of social norms and values by which people used to order their lives and their relationships. The measure of one's Christian conviction, the extent of one's love and charity was in preserving the outer signs and symbols of the European way of life – whether you had acquired European good manners, dressed as the European did, liked European hymns and tunes, etc. was all-important. The acceptance of the Christian church, the triumph of the missionary endeavor, meant the rejection of African customs.<sup>410</sup>

Cochrane, in his look at the English-speaking churches from 1903 – 1930, paints a bleak picture in how the church, missionaries and the missionary movement in general became “servants of power”. This whole endeavor, in other words, was co-opted by “the powers” in expanding Western colonialism. And this history cannot be denied.

And yet, through this imperfect missionary movement, Richard Elphick demonstrates how seeds of egalitarianism, or *gelykstelling* – the equalization among the races, which challenged the ways in which society became structured – has its roots in the theological proclamation of the early missionaries.<sup>411</sup> This seed of equality posed a constant challenge to white domination.<sup>412</sup> Indeed, as John de Gruchy notes, “the church’s struggle against racism and injustice began in earnest with the witness of the early missionaries.”<sup>413</sup>

Elizabeth Elbourne, for example, suggests:

The farmers of the Eastern Cape upheld a Christianity of exclusion, whereby religion defined membership in the moral community – arguing that the Khoisan were constitutively incapable of becoming Christian. The Khoisan upheld a Christianity of equality, arguing for access to the moral community through grace alone – and implicitly in opposition to restrictions based on skin colour. By becoming missionaries among dependents of the patriarchal household, as a number of them did, they were also establishing an alternate source of authority to the white patriarch.<sup>414</sup>

The early missionaries and their witness, as flawed and paternalistic as they were, did also challenge the authoritarian and white patriarchy system with an alternative societal and communal way of life based on equality.

The missionary movement in South Africa cannot, obviously, be depicted as uniform or cohesive. Many different Christian expressions, denominations, and

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<sup>410</sup> Barney Nyameko Pityana, "What Is Black Consciousness?," in *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, ed. Basil Moore (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1974), 59.

<sup>411</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 2.

<sup>412</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 2.

<sup>413</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 13.

<sup>414</sup> Elizabeth Elbourne, "Concerning Missionaries: The Case of Van Der Kemp," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17, no. 1 (Mar) (1991): 164.

methods were employed in South Africa. Indeed, a lot of conflict arose out of the different theological understandings of the Christian message and approaches towards mission. But through this all, Elphick demonstrates a small thread of more radically minded missionaries existed that either introduced or reinforced the idea of *gelykstelling*. And this, he argues, eventually led to the quest for political liberation from apartheid and white domination.

### Early “prophetic” or radical missionary witnesses

In following Elphick’s historical look at the missionary movement in South Africa, we will look at some examples of those who were more radically minded and how they proved to be “prophetic” as they sowed seeds not only for the equalization of the races, which Elphick’s book explores, but of the larger prophetic theology movement itself.

One of the first examples is that of Johannes Theodorus van der Kemp (1747-1811). Van der Kemp arrived in South Africa in 1799 and helped to establish the London Missionary Society. Van der Kemp, in coming from a more nonconformist mission movement, was less congenial to the political establishment.<sup>415</sup> He spent much of his missionary career working with the Xhosa and the Khoikhoi, or Hottentot, people. Not surprisingly, this had a substantial impact on him.

While some English-speaking liberals defend van der Kemp, Afrikaners have often blamed him for tensions between missionaries and colonists, especially due to his “peculiar views on social equalization of Hottentots and whites.”<sup>416</sup> “His rage against the colonists, and against the regime that supported them, was influenced for the most part neither by the Enlightenment nor by the French Revolution, but by antipathy toward whites who, in his view, falsely claimed to be Christian, and by strong sentimental affection for the Khoisan and slave converts, whom many whites abused and exploited.”<sup>417</sup> Elphick notes that for van der Kemp, the gospel affirmed

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<sup>415</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 15.

<sup>416</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 17.

<sup>417</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 17.

that Africans were potential brothers and sisters in Christ.<sup>418</sup> Elbourne takes this further, highlighting Van der Kemp's belief that:

The poor and uneducated were believed to have as much access to truth as the leisured (and therefore wealthy) intellectuals of the Cartesian model, because God, and hence knowledge, were experienced rather than attained through ratiocination. Van der Kemp believed that the Khoisan were better Christians than the Boers—a disturbing claim in a society in which oppression was often justified by the claim that the Khoisan were constitutively incapable of becoming Christians.<sup>419</sup>

Such convictions challenged the “white settlers’ confidence that Christianity was a badge of their own superiority and their charter of group privileges.”<sup>420</sup>

Whereas many British government officials saw missionaries as patriotic professionals in the service of the British Empire, van der Kemp, with his challenge against racial oppression at the hands of both the English and the Dutch, proved to be an exception to the model of typical missionary careers.<sup>421</sup> Indeed, evangelical Christian missionaries for the most part were, ironically, among those who proved to buck the already set and hardened racial barriers.<sup>422</sup> The evangelical message that anyone who accepted the living Christ, including those who were “non-white”, could be saved from the power of sin and death, thus becoming an equal brother or sister in Christ in this life, proved to be revolutionary. It is for this reason white settlers found evangelical missionaries so threatening.<sup>423</sup> Blacks clearly understood the egalitarian implications of the conversion experience.<sup>424</sup>

Unfortunately, the maelstrom of South African politics reshaped missionary work, which caused it to shift towards a more paternalistic and controlling method among those who were the recipients of “mission” – i.e., those who were “non-white” – in the “mission station”. It would, Elphick notes, “subvert much of the egalitarianism of their original message.”<sup>425</sup>

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<sup>418</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 17.

<sup>419</sup> Elbourne, "Concerning Missionaries," 160.

<sup>420</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 17.

<sup>421</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 20.

<sup>422</sup> I say “ironically” given what we have already seen in chapter two regarding “Church Theology”, namely that Evangelical Christians became, by and large, protectors of the status quo in the 20<sup>th</sup> century under apartheid. This was not, however, the case in the earliest parts of their history, especially among the early missionaries.

<sup>423</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 27.

<sup>424</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 27.

<sup>425</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 20.

...[I]n weakening the egalitarianism inherent in the evangelical message of Christian brotherhood and sisterhood, the mission station drove a wedge between the missionary and the message he came to preach. In the coming century, Africans, far more than missionaries, would seek out the half-forgotten egalitarian promise and try to resurrect it in the church and in society at large.<sup>426</sup>

Although this is undoubtedly true, Elbourne also demonstrates how, even though paternalistic, the mission stations challenged the economic system that had already been well established. During this time, white farmers relied on the use of blacks as units of cheap labour, taking advantage of the lack of many rights in how labourers were treated. Becoming attached to a mission station<sup>427</sup> removed one from the colonial labour pool if one wished. Being a nominal resident of a mission station provided a legal residence which would free a farm labourer from being forced to renew a long-term contract because one would have no other place to go.<sup>428</sup> “People could also leave their children [at the mission stations] to prevent them being held as hostages.”<sup>429</sup> This, notes Elbourne,

interfered with a system whereby the legal disability of Khoi to own land within the colony and consequent annihilation of their traditional nomadic economy, coupled with vagrancy rules and an inequitable system of long-term contract labour, among other factors, had almost completely destroyed the capacity of Khoisan to avoid functioning as de facto slave labour on white farms.<sup>430</sup>

Another example among some of the more “radical” missionary voices was that of Dammes Pierre Marie Huet. Among the Dutch settlers there was significant discomfort regarding the possibility of *gelykstelling* or the equalization among the races. Dutch Reformed missionary work, although deeply influenced by Andrew Murray Jr. as well as British and American evangelicalism,<sup>431</sup> created a two-tiered clergy system. A pastor (*dominee*) would serve the established (settler) churches whereas a missionary (*eerwaarde*) would administer the Holy Sacraments among “the Heathen”.<sup>432</sup> There was fear of equalization among the Dutch-speaking whites:

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<sup>426</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 25.

<sup>427</sup> Elbourne uses Bethelsdorp as an example.

<sup>428</sup> Elbourne, “Concerning Missionaries,” 159.

<sup>429</sup> Elbourne, “Concerning Missionaries,” 159.

<sup>430</sup> Elbourne, “Concerning Missionaries,” 159.

<sup>431</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 41.

<sup>432</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 42.

Many Dutch-speaking whites feared that missions would lead to *gelykstelling*, that is, to equalization among the races, a fear descended from eighteenth-century colonists' belief that civil rights derived from one's status as a Christian, and from the consequent fear of slaveholders that their slaves, if baptized, would thereupon be free.<sup>433</sup>

Thus, due to a "weakness of some", the Dutch Reformed synod held in 1857, even though at that time it believed that racial segregation in the church was neither "desirable" nor "scriptural", approved racial separation.

Huet condemned this capitulation towards segregation. In a study of missions, he vehemently attacked this 1857 synod resolution.

Huet granted that God permitted inequalities in worldly society, but none whatever in the spiritual realm. To those who said that blacks were a "separate nation," Huet replied that Jesus called all believers to become "one nation." To those who worried that mixing in church would lead to interracial marriage, he pointed out that Moses's Cushite wife might have been black, or at least brown. And as for the "weakness of some," referred to in the synodal decision, he asked "Who are the weak?" To which he answered: "Those without conversion, without grace, without love, who want to hold themselves above others, and who treat their fellow men with curses and sjambok [whip] blows, because they are servants or their skin is black, and want to give them no place in the same church with themselves. Do we call such people and others like them weak—weak believers? Is that not a misuse of words? We call them cruel, hard, haughty sinners who must not be spared."<sup>434</sup>

Despite Huet's strong criticism, the DRC maintained a strong evangelical missionary zeal with a segregationist ecclesiology.<sup>435</sup>

Dr. John Philip was another voice that challenged the deeply rooted racial separation in the South African context. Philip was the superintendent of the London Missionary Society (LMS) from 1819 – 1851. Although he was a man of his time, being an avid advocate of British imperialism, along with the paternalism that naturally emerged from such loyalties, an example of which we noted above, Philip believed in the innate equality among all people.<sup>436</sup> This belief, however, was also accompanied with a clear acceptance and recognition of different degree of rank and office.<sup>437</sup> As such, Philip's view on mission and society included the acceptance as brother and sister in Christ even those who were "not white", but also the "blessing" of "civilization", which he clearly understood to be that of British culture. Just as

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<sup>433</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 42-43.

<sup>434</sup> D. Pierre M. Huet's book *Ééne kudde en één Herder: Verhandeling over de toebrenging van Heidenen tot de Christelijke kerkgemeenschap* (Cape Town: N. H. Marais, 1860), 34-52.

<sup>435</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 51.

<sup>436</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 56.

<sup>437</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 56.

civilization could not develop without mission, mission, he believed, could not produce civilization without just laws. “Close cooperation between missions and government was therefore required... ‘While our missionaries... are everywhere scattering the seeds of civilization, social order, and happiness, they are, by the most unexceptionable means, extending British interests, British influence, and the British empire.’”<sup>438</sup> Here we see the accuracy of Pityana’s account noted above.

And yet, Philip, argues Elphick, was a publicist of the grievances of exploited indigenous peoples, an advocate of legal equality between white and black in the Cape Colony, and a defender of the integrity of African kingdoms.<sup>439</sup> Indeed, he became for many white South Africans the problem of the English-speaking missionary movement.<sup>440</sup> Although there are obvious problems with some of his imperialist and paternalistic ways of thinking, he was still a voice and a witness that challenged the racial separation and economic oppression that was becoming increasingly established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

But, as Elphick notes,

... it was not missionaries, but rather black Christians, who most clearly drew out the implications of the gospel’s insistence on the equality of all souls before God, and the equality of all languages and of all ministers as bearers of the word of God. Black Christians were convinced that such doctrines required equality with whites, both in church and in state.<sup>441</sup>

And this inevitably leads to the next section.

## The Emergence of Ethiopianism, African Independent (or Initiated) Churches

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after more than a century of mission in South Africa, whites still largely led the mission stations and maintained the leadership roles in churches that emerged from these stations.<sup>442</sup> Ordination, authority, and leadership were slow to be granted to black Christians.

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<sup>438</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 58.

<sup>439</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 52.

<sup>440</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 52.

<sup>441</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 64.

<sup>442</sup> This was already demonstrated in the second chapter on “Church Theology”, especially with the birth of the Pentecostal movement in South Africa.

Although many black Christians welcomed the possibility of equality—*gelykstelling*—assuming that conversion and belonging in the church would lead towards it, they began to learn that, even within mission churches, whites were at best hesitant and at worse unwilling to include black Christians in leadership and authoritative positions. Elphick says:

In the days of Georg Schmidt, and early in the nineteenth century, Africans believed that through conversion they might become the sisters and brothers of Europeans. To this end, many African Christians had submitted to the discipline of a Western education, worked closely with white colleagues, and frequently built up strong congregations of black followers. Having cleared the hurdle of ordination, they believed that they had entered the citadel of the church, and were shocked to be confronted there with what they interpreted as slights, insults, and unequal treatment. Their former mentors refused to treat them as colleagues, much less as brothers.<sup>443</sup>

Missionaries were concerned that their African converts were unable to administer organizations, manage money, rebuke sin, or maintain high standards of doctrine and morality.<sup>444</sup> “In the missionaries’ eyes, Africans had proved that they could spread the gospel, but not reshape the character and culture of their people.”<sup>445</sup>

This hesitation to hand over authority and leadership<sup>446</sup> was, however, contrary to the missionary’s own principles. According to the principles that the Anglican Church Missionary Society as well as the American Board of missions articulated, “the central goal of missions was a ‘native church’ under ‘a native pastorate’; missionaries should surrender control of the churches they founded, not settle down as ministers of the ‘native church.’”<sup>447</sup> And yet, rarely was such control and authority passed on. A significant paternalism remained in order to “ensure” progression towards a “civilized” manner of being.

The result of which, not surprisingly, was increased frustration towards empty promises of equalization. The best-known manifesto of Ethiopian grievances, notes Elphick, was a letter written by Mangena Maake Mokone in 1892. In it, Mokone noted the differences that existed within the church among its black and white clergy.

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<sup>443</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 88.

<sup>444</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 86.

<sup>445</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 85.

<sup>446</sup> It behooves us to recognize how paternalistic this phrase is, and yet this is the way in which authority and leadership were understood during that particular time – i.e., it was “handed over”, as though it was the missionary’s property and prerogative rather than something that was invited and assumed.

<sup>447</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 86.



Black clergy, for example, had much lower salaries and living conditions than their white counterparts. Likewise, “‘No Native minister is honoured among the white brethren. The more the Native humbles himself, the more they make a fool of him.’ Racial segregation at clergy district meetings ‘shows that we can’t be brothers.’”<sup>448</sup> Although the early missionaries’ message was that of *gelykstelling*, it quickly absorbed the broader societal separation and racial distinction and thus failed to embody its own ideals and principles.<sup>449</sup>

This led to the emergence of Ethiopianism and the creation of African Initiated (or Independent) Churches (AICs).<sup>450</sup> As Vuyani S. Vellem notes, “Ethiopianism was a reaction to racism in the church and society.”<sup>451</sup> These were churches initiated and led by black clergy who did not depend on white “superintendents” for approval. Broadly speaking, Ethiopian churches “often retained

<sup>448</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 88.

<sup>449</sup> Vuyani S. Vellem, for example, describes how the birth of the Bantu Presbyterian Church (BPC) – a black, “native” church was born largely due to the perceived threat of the Ethiopian Movement. Interestingly, missionaries were hesitant in starting a separate black Presbyterian church largely due out of the desire to remain unified as one church rather segregated along racial lines. This desire, notes Vellem, was based on the recent re-unification of two “mother churches” in Scotland after the “Great Disruption” in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Vuyani S. Vellem, “The ‘Native Experiment’: The Formation of the Bantu Presbyterian Church and the Defects of Faith Transplanted on African Soil,” *Missionalia* 41, no. 2 [2013]: 150). Another reason why some were hesitant was out of fear that a native congregation, with an anti-white bias, could be captured by a political party that was hostile to the British government (Vellem, “The ‘Native Experiment,’” 152).

Separation along racial lines did, however, occur, and Vellem notes two particular reasons for this. The first was due to the influence and encouragement from James Stewart who pondered a “native church in federal relations” – i.e., he was motivated, according to Van der Spuy, by “political and practical considerations” (D. Van der Spuy, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa,” [Grahamstown: Rhodes University, 1971], 35). Vellem notes how similar this reasoning was to that of the DRC decision to segregate “due to the weakness of some...”. This, Vellem argues, along with a close relationship with the DRC who were together discussing the possibility of amalgamating, demonstrates the potential similarity in ethos between the two (Vellem, “The ‘Native Experiment,’” 157-58). The second reason was because of the rise of the Ethiopian Movement. “[T]he Ethiopian Movement became a factor in the formation of the BPC and the missionaries had to either allow the existence of a black church under their patronage, or feared a walk out of black Christians who were captured by the spirit of the moment...” (Vellem, “The ‘Native Experiment,’” 153).

<sup>450</sup> Bengt Sundkler, in his book *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London, UK: Lutterworth Press, 1948), highlights three types of independent churches: the Ethiopian church, Zionist, and Messianic churches. “Ethiopian” churches referred to churches that wanted to highlight that Christianity came to Africa long before the European missionary. Thus, as Ethiopia had never been colonized and as Mangena Maake Mokone noted how, in Psalms 68:31, Ethiopia would play such a key role, they wanted to stress their independence from such European based Christianity. Sundkler’s use of “Zionist” refers to those independent groups who sought some kind synthesis between Christian faith and African tradition. “Messianic” churches referred to those churches that espoused and followed the leadership of a “Native Messiah.” For our purposes in this work it will suffice to simply note that these churches sought a form of “independence” from the European, white dominated church expression. As John de Gruchy notes: “These independent churches symbolize the black revolt against European spiritual and cultural domination” (de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 46).

<sup>451</sup> Vellem, “The ‘Native Experiment,’” 159.

much of the doctrine and liturgy of the missionary churches but stressed the idea of ‘African churches for Africans’,” whereas the Zionists, another significant portion of AI churches, “emphasised the charisma and strength of their prophet leaders, incorporated some traditional African ideas [and practices] and placed great importance on the power of the Holy Spirit and on faith-healing and baptism by immersion.”<sup>452</sup> The emergence of such churches was not only startling for the established churches but revolutionary. J. Mutero Chirenje, a Zimbabwean historian writing in the 80s, noted that “if the activities of the Ethiopian movement and allied organizations... are viewed in the context of their time, they will be seen to be no less acts of self-determination than are the armed struggles for national liberation now taking place throughout southern Africa.”<sup>453</sup> The emergence of Ethiopianism or AICs was, for many whites, politically subversive as well as a political threat.<sup>454</sup> The inevitable political extension of this development was, as Elphick highlights, a natural extension of their religious commitment to racial equality: “... they demanded of the British Empire what they demanded of the mission churches: that it live up to the promise of racial equality evident in its rhetoric and its proclaimed ideals.”<sup>455</sup> “The missionaries, for their part, had to concede that Ethiopian rebels, in their demand for Africanization, were aligning themselves with the official mission policies the missionaries in the field had so often resisted.”<sup>456</sup>

John de Gruchy suggests several reasons for the emergence of AICs. First, the AIC movement was a rejection of white control and dominance. Second, it was a rejection of European culture and the suppression of African culture in the life of the church. Third, it was a rejection of racial discrimination and paternalism. And finally, it was a movement resulting from the desire for power and prestige – the same, arguably, that white clergy enjoyed.<sup>457</sup> “Whatever their faults, however, these churches stand as a legitimate protest against white racism and ecclesiastical

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<sup>452</sup> This is an observation provided by Colleen Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers [Pty] Ltd., 1990), 102.

<sup>453</sup> J. Mutero Chirenje, *Ethiopianism and Afro-Americans in Southern Africa, 1883-1916* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 168.

<sup>454</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 43.

<sup>455</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 92.

<sup>456</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 93.

<sup>457</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 44-45.

imperialism, and in their own right as remarkable attempts to bring together Christian faith and the traditions of Africa.<sup>458</sup>

Maurice Leenhardt says:

In truth the peoples of southern Africa are not far wrong if they say to the missionaries, 'The Gospel is supposed to emancipate us, but it does not give us liberty.'... Did [the missionaries] imagine that they would work at reforming the individual without soon shaking up the masses and causing them to demand new social conditions?<sup>459</sup>

The revolutionary and prophetic character of the gospel, the seed of which had been planted by the early missionary movement, was beginning to sprout. It began to sprout through the emergence of black nationalism in response to the socio-political trajectory taking root in South Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century. And Christianity, notes de Gruchy, played a vital role in its emergence and development.<sup>460</sup> Although the early missionaries might have planted the seed of equality, as Elphick argues, black leaders realized that the struggle for equality and freedom was their own. The emergence of Ethiopianism and AICs demonstrated that they were no longer willing to depend on the white-dominated churches for their emancipation.

### The Christian Institute

We would be remiss if we explored the trajectory of a prophetic theological movement in South Africa without touching on the example of the Christian Institute.

With the advent of apartheid in 1948, those outside of the Afrikaner *volk* began to raise more and more questions as Grand Apartheid enshrined into law. We have seen how segregation was largely the social reality since the time of the earliest settlers, and how even the English settlers and their churches followed the already set path regarding racial segregation. Segregation was a well-established pattern before 1948. But, putting such assumed practices into law proved to be another matter.

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<sup>458</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 45.

<sup>459</sup> Maurice Leenhardt, *Le Mouvement Éthiopien Au Sud De L'Afrique De 1896 À 1899* (University of California: Académie des sciences d'outre-mer, 1902), 112.

<sup>460</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 47.

Having the state – and an Afrikaner state at that – determine with whom one could worship or which church one could belong was difficult for churches that were outside of the Afrikaner *volk*. This led to several different conferences, letters, and synodical resolutions; some of which we already noted earlier in chapter one and two.

As the level of discomfort grew with regards to the National Party's increase in legalized segregation, so did the means through which the government was willing to use in order to roll out and maintain its system. 21 March 1960 proved to be a memorable example as to the extremes the government was willing to use.

In 1950, the National Party introduced the Group Areas Act that specified areas “non-white” people could live and where they could not live. Likewise, this act made it a legal requirement for all “non-whites” to carry passbooks that detailed where they were allowed to be, the permissions they required if they were going to be in “whites only areas”, and so forth. On 21 March 1960, the Pan-African Congress (PAC) organized a march against this act and the stated necessity for all “non-white” people to carry the much-hated passbooks that robbed any and all dignity from those who were forced to carry them. In Sharpeville, those who participated in this march left their passbooks at home and marched to the local Police station to hand themselves in for breaking the law for not carrying them. The police opened fire on the demonstrators, killing 69 of them—mostly women; and most of them shot in the back as they ran away. This has become known as the Sharpeville Massacre.<sup>461</sup>

This tragic event became the impetus for almost all of the different churches in South Africa to come together to talk about the conflict of which this massacre had become an example.<sup>462</sup> The churches asked what they could do amid all of this bitterness and frustration?<sup>463</sup> As a result of this growing tension, the World Council of

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<sup>461</sup> It might also be worth noting that only weeks later, the then Prime Minister of the country, Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd, was wounded in an assassination attempt at the annual Rand Easter Show in Johannesburg. Following this failed assassination attempt a State of Emergency was declared, and in the weeks that followed, many blacks were arrested, imprisoned, and/or banned. See de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 47.

<sup>462</sup> A note must be made regarding wording. This sentence makes it seem as though there was no conflict prior to the Sharpeville Massacre when indeed there was. Sharpeville was, however, the event that made it all too clear to the predominantly *white* led churches that there was an increasing problem – an arising conflict – when this had been apparent for blacks from the beginning of their experience of colonization and oppression. An atrocity such as Sharpeville was more of a wake up call to the white population and its church, and this must be noted and remembered as such.

<sup>463</sup> Piet Meiring, "Remembering Cottesloe: Delegates to the Cottesloe Consultation Tell Their Stories," *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* v. 54, no. 3 & 4 (2013): 30.

Churches (WCC) organized a consultation, which became known as the Cottesloe Consultation, from 7 – 14 December, 1960.

The Cottesloe Consultation was particularly special for several different reasons.<sup>464</sup> First it was a truly ecumenical conference where all denominations, including representatives of the NGK and the NHK, were present. Ten delegates from each of the eight South African member churches of the WCC attended the consultation along with five representatives of the WCC itself.<sup>465</sup> There were also eighteen black participants, including Bishop Alphaeus Zulu and Professor Z. K. Matthews, eight laypeople, including Alan Paton and anthropologist Monica Wilson who was the only woman delegate.<sup>466</sup>

Second, except for the representatives of the NHK, there was unanimous support for the Cottesloe Declaration that came out of the consultation. This included virtually all of the representatives of the NGK.<sup>467</sup> This declaration, although still relatively moderate, rejected all unjust discrimination. Although the opinions varied largely on apartheid itself, they agreed that the church has a duty “to proclaim that the final criterion of all social and political action is the principles of Scripture regarding the realisation of all men of a life worthy of their God-given vocation.”<sup>468</sup>

The Cottesloe Declaration also achieved far-reaching consensus in the following representative statements:<sup>469</sup>

- recognize that all racial groups who permanently inhabit our country are a part of our total population, and we regard them as indigenous. Members of all these groups have an equal right to make their contribution towards the enrichment of the life of their country and to share in the ensuing responsibilities, rewards and privileges.
- Non-one [sic] who believes in Jesus Christ may be excluded from any church on the grounds of his colour or race. The spiritual unity among all men who are in Christ must find visible

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<sup>464</sup> Unfortunately, given the scope of this dissertation, we are only able to offer a brief account of the Cottesloe Consultation and its significance. For further insight into Cottesloe see de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 61. Dr. A. H. Lückhoff, *Cottesloe* (Tafelberg-Uitgewers, 1978); Meiring, "Remembering Cottesloe"; John de Gruchy, "From Cottesloe to Rustenburg and Beyond: The Rustenburg Conference in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 74, no. Mr (1991); and J. M. Van der Merwe, "Cottesloe 50 Years Later: Did the Dutch Reformed Church Answer to the Call?," *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* v. 51, no. 3 & 4 (2010).

<sup>465</sup> E. Van der Borgh, "'Unity That Sanctifies Diversity'. Cottesloe Revisited," *Acta Theologica* 31, no. 2 (2011).

<sup>466</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 63.

<sup>467</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 64.

<sup>468</sup> Meiring, "Remembering Cottesloe," 32.

<sup>469</sup> There were more than that listed here. These serve, however, as a good representation of the agreed upon statements that demonstrate why the Cottesloe Declaration caused such a stir.

expression in acts of common worship and witness, and in fellowship and consultation on matters of common concern.

- There are no Scriptural grounds for the prohibition of mixed marriages.<sup>470</sup>
- We call attention once again to the disintegrating effects of migrant labour on African life. No stable society is possible unless the cardinal importance of family life is recognized, and, from the Christian standpoint, it is imperative that the integrity of the family be safeguarded.
- It is now widely recognized that the wages received by the vast majority of the non-White people oblige them to exist well below the generally accepted minimum standard for healthy living. Concerted action is required to remedy this grave situation.
- It is our conviction that the right to own land wherever he is domiciled, and to participate in the government of his country, is part of the dignity of the adult man, and for this reason a policy which permanently denies to non-White people the right of collaboration in the government of the country of which they are citizens cannot be justified.
- It is our conviction that there can be no objection in principle to the direct representation of Coloured people in Parliament.<sup>471</sup>

Richard Elphick provides a helpful summary of the significance of this declaration:

These controversial features of the Cottesloe resolutions did not derive, for the most part, from the liberal churches' preliminary papers, but from that of the Cape DRC. The NHK, as expected, rejected the entire communiqué, but the two DR delegations acquiesced, though with two clarifications: they still regarded 'a policy of differentiation... [as]... the only realistic solution to the problems of race relations,' and they approved of voting rights only for Africans 'domiciled in the declared White areas in the sense that they have no other homeland.' In other words, for the DRC delegations, apartheid remained the only workable solution, but such features of apartheid as segregated churches and anti-miscegenation laws were merely matters of social convenience, and not based on Christian principle; and the franchise could be granted to Coloureds and to urban Africans, two groups not accommodated by Verwoerd's soon-to-be 'independent' homelands. Franklin Fry, the consultation chair, reported to WCC headquarters that 'while many of the statements... might seem commonplace outside South Africa, they were in fact very significant and far-reaching within the South African scene'.<sup>472</sup>

Likewise, Eduardus Van der Borgh notes how, although the statement itself did not dismiss segregation outright, nor did it mention black representation in Parliament, "the implications of the Statement were far-reaching, and offered the contours of a concrete social vision based [on] an alternative theological evaluation of the race relations in South Africa."<sup>473</sup>

Third, the Cottesloe Consultation was one of the last ecumenical gatherings and conversations in which the DRC would participate until the Rustenburg Conference in

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<sup>470</sup> Although the statement does continue in stating that "The well-being of the community and pastoral responsibility require, however, that due consideration should be given to certain factors which may make such marriages inadvisable" (Leslie A. Hewson, ed. *Cottesloe Consultation: The Report of the Consultation among South African Member Churches of the World Council of Churches, 7-14 December, 1960* (Cottesloe, Johannesburg: World Council of Churches, 1961), 74.

<sup>471</sup> Hewson, *Cottesloe Consultation*, 75.

<sup>472</sup> Hewson, *Cottesloe Consultation*, 74-76.

<sup>473</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 316-17.

1990. The NHK, the more conservative branch of the DRC family of churches, rejected the Cottesloe Declaration out of hand.<sup>474</sup> It was also rumoured that the NHK delegates were in frequent consultation with political leaders including Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd during the consultation.<sup>475</sup> After this historic consultation where even the members of the NGK approved the final joint declaration, the Afrikaner community, led by the secret Afrikaner Broederbond,<sup>476</sup> resolved to corral the errant DR delegates back into the Afrikaner *volk* fold.<sup>477</sup>

The theological professors at Stellenbosch repudiated the Cottesloe resolutions, followed by the Orange Free State DR synod. Then the council of the four DR churches (Raad van die Kerke) followed suit, as did the small South West African and Natal synods. When the General Church Assembly of the NHK repudiated Cottesloe and, in addition, voted to leave the WCC, the Transvaal DR church found itself threatened with a loss of members to the NHK. Hounded by the Afrikaans press and by its own laity, the Transvaal synod turned aside its own delegates' spirited defense of their actions at Cottesloe, repudiated the consultation, and withdrew from the WCC. Several months later, a similar drama played out in the Cape synod, and with the same result. With all the Afrikaans churches outside the WCC, the most promising rapprochement between the DR and English-speaking churches since the 1920s, and the most public defection of leading Afrikaners from government policy since 1948, had run aground. Ecumenism was dead for a generation, and the Dutch Reformed churches almost wholly isolated.<sup>478</sup>

The Cottesloe Consultation was the final straw in the DRC's relationship and membership in the WCC and its member churches in South Africa until 1990. The DRC officially isolated itself and in essence drew its laager tighter together in defense of its apartheid policy and the lengths it would go for the Afrikaner *volk*.

This experience in Cottesloe and its aftermath within the DR church proved to be too much for Beyers Naudé.<sup>479</sup> Naudé lamented the fact that, in the wake of

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<sup>474</sup> Borgh, "'Unity That Sanctifies Diversity'. Cottesloe Revisited," 319.

<sup>475</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 64.

<sup>476</sup> Piet Meiring notes that the Broederbond, along with other cultural organizations, sent angry letters and admonitions to their members to "be on the watch against the enemy within" (de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 64).

<sup>477</sup> Meiring, "Remembering Cottesloe," 34.

<sup>478</sup> Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 317.

<sup>479</sup> Due to the scope of this dissertation, we will only be able to touch all too briefly on the amazing life and witness of Beyers Naudé. For a more in-depth look into the life, witness, and significance of Naudé, see Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 317. Beyers Naudé, *My Land Van Hoop: Die Lewe Van Beyers Naudé* (Kapaad, Pretoria, Johannesburg: Human & Rousseau, 1995); Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*; L. D. Hansen, ed. *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé*, Beyers Naudé Centre Series on Public Theology (Stellenbosch, South Africa: SUN Press, 2005); Peter Randall, ed. *Not without Honour: Tribute to Beyers Naudé* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982); Charles Villa-Vicencio and John de Gruchy, eds., *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naudé* (Cape Town & Johannesburg: Grand Rapids: David Philip; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985). In this section I focus more

Cottesloe, critical thinking in the ranks of the DRC became increasingly difficult.<sup>480</sup> Piet Meiring notes how the “barrage of criticism that confronted the Cottesloe delegates, the way in which men and women who dared to think differently, were side-lined, sometimes ostracized, and declared to be unpatriotic, even un-Christian, deterred many to think, and speak, and stand for themselves.”<sup>481</sup> Colleen Ryans depicts the Cottesloe Consultation as the Damascus in Naudé’s life.<sup>482</sup> This experience sent Naudé from the path of Afrikaner nationalism, which he had been walking, which included leadership in the NGK and membership within the secretive Broederbond, onto a path that would challenge, criticize, and vehemently oppose the apartheid system in order to promote unity within the church and society.

After Cottesloe and its aftermath, Naudé, along with Albert Geyser, Fred van Wyk, A. J. van Wyk, and Dr. J. B. Webb, started the Christian Institute (CI) in 1963. The CI was an ecumenical organization that promoted dialogue between Afrikaans- and English-speaking Christians as well as searching for justice and reconciliation between the races in South Africa. “The founders of the CI hoped that the Institute would enable members of all races of the Afrikaans and other churches to share together in bearing witness to the unity of the church and the lordship of Christ over society.”<sup>483</sup> The CI was, for Naudé, a very practical expression of placing his commitment to Jesus before all else, including his own *volk* and the political system and its religious justification of such a system. The end result of which was Naudé’s own people considering him to be a traitor to their cause and identity.

The first focus of the CI was its attempt to change the awareness and understanding of white Christians in South Africa who had never stopped to question the status quo of apartheid society and its implementation. This was done primarily through Bible study and a rediscovery of the biblical message, especially as it related to questions pertaining to race.<sup>484</sup> In Naudé’s own personal journey, he became increasingly aware of the thin biblical justification the NGK and the other Afrikaner

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on Ryan’s *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith* as she does, in my opinion, a wonderful job in highlighting the shifts both in his thinking and the practical outcomes of such shifts.

<sup>480</sup> Meiring, “Remembering Cottesloe,” 36.

<sup>481</sup> Meiring, “Remembering Cottesloe,” 36.

<sup>482</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 61.

<sup>483</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 101.

<sup>484</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 102.



churches provided for apartheid.<sup>485</sup> The NGK declared the work of Naudé and the CI to be unacceptable and, as a result, revoked his ministerial credentials. “The CI, and Naudé in particular, were regarded as driving a wedge down the middle of Afrikaner society.”<sup>486</sup> As a result, and perhaps inevitably, Naudé turned to English-speaking churches for support but soon discovered that these churches, although making official declarations that challenged apartheid policy, were practically not that different when it came to exploring fundamental social change in South Africa.<sup>487</sup>

Beyers realised that in the early years he had been mistaken in believing that the English-speaking, multi-racial churches could play a major role as agents of change in South Africa. He appreciated the courageous stand taken by many individuals in these churches but he was disillusioned with the often racist or paternalistic attitudes of the majority of rank-and-file members and some of the their leaders. He came to the conclusion that the CI had to encourage and nurture small groups within these churches that would challenge fellow members to reconsider their obedience to the gospel.<sup>488</sup>

The CI, from its inception, was never popular with the government. An example as to why can be seen as a result of Naudé’s break from the Broederbond. In 1962-63, it came to light that Broederbond documents were leaked to what the Afrikaners described as the “liberal English media”. In 1963 the Security Branch opened an investigation to explore how and more importantly who leaked these documents. The involvement of the Security Branch into such a scandal demonstrates the influence the Broederbond had on all aspects of Afrikaner life and interests in South Africa, religious as well as political.<sup>489</sup> As Naudé began to openly question and challenge such realities, he asked members of the Security Branch, when they had come to question him, how “a member of the Security Branch had been entrusted with the investigation of a charge of theft and house-breaking, where, in the first place, there was no question of theft and house-breaking, and secondly, when the State was not involved.”<sup>490</sup> “I asked them this,” Naudé said, “because I was wondering whether the publication of Broederbond documents was tantamount to undermining the safety

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<sup>485</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 30-52.

<sup>486</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 103.

<sup>487</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 103.

<sup>488</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 190.

<sup>489</sup> See Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 86-95.

<sup>490</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 94.

of the State and whether the security machinery of the State was being used to keep a secret society secret.”<sup>491</sup>

However irksome Naudé was for the government in his critique against apartheid, the crunch came when the CI became more involved in the Black Consciousness movement.<sup>492</sup> As Naudé’s ongoing faith journey continued, and thus subsequently the CI’s journey, he found the need to step away from the common white tendency towards paternalism, a trait that existed even with white liberals, and more towards the expressions and direction of blacks as they struggled to regain a sense of their own dignity and humanity in the midst of white oppression and injustice.<sup>493</sup>

This awareness largely emerged as a result of the CI’s Study Project on Christianity in an Apartheid Society (Spro-cas) which was launched in the early part of 1969. Spro-cas arose as an attempt to explore alternatives to apartheid and its rule. Whereas the *Message to the People of South Africa*,<sup>494</sup> which the CI and the SACC jointly released in 1968, provided a valuable critique against apartheid and the pseudo-gospel it embraced justifying its pursuit of separate development, it had not spelt out any alternatives to apartheid. Peter Walshe notes that *the Message* stopped short in its understanding of the Gospel as a call for the under-privileged and poor to take their futures in their own hands.<sup>495</sup> Spro-cas, therefore, set out to move beyond *The Message* and examine and explore alternatives to various aspects of South African society, including political, social, economic, and religious.<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 94.

<sup>492</sup> John W. De Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979), 109. See, for example, Naudé’s address delivered at the Citizen’s Protest Meeting in Johannesburg, 19 September, 1977, entitled “Steve Biko: The Man and His Message” in de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 107.

<sup>493</sup> Hansen, *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé*, 77-80.

<sup>494</sup> South African Council of Churches, *Message to the People of South Africa* (Braamfontein, South Africa: South African Council of Churches, 1968). *The Message* did, notes Walshe, point in the direction of political and liberation theology, thus furthering “the evolution of theology in South Africa and helped to raise political consciousness among a small minority of whites and many blacks who later were able to develop its insights much further during the turmoil of the 1970s. In pointing to the need for an analysis of the structural foundations of injustice, the Message helped to prepare the way for black theology which in turn contributed to the growth of the black consciousness movement. In other words, the liberating, open-ended nature of this clear statement was not to be circumscribed by an initially vague grasp of its full implications” (Peter Walshe, *Church Versus State in South Africa: The Case of the Christian Institute* [London: C. Hurst & Company, 1983], 62).

<sup>495</sup> Peter Walshe, *Church Versus State in South Africa*, 62.

<sup>496</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 130.

Through this study program, and especially through the church study, Naudé and the CI came to appreciate more fully black demands, especially in the church's failure to promote inter-racial communication and understanding.<sup>497</sup> "...[T]he Church Commission spelt out how patterns of inequality and discrimination were ingrained not only in the Afrikaans churches, but also in the multi-racial English-speaking churches. It found that in some churches white domination was maintained by a disproportionate weighting in the supreme church courts and by the packing of important committees and commissions."<sup>498</sup> But, in spite of this reality, the church stood in a unique position to create inter-racial contact as well as community development and social change, especially in demonstrating a different perception and openness to black participation and leadership, which also included more fair pay scales between those of different races, if it decided to do so intentionally.<sup>499</sup>

Although the proposals from Spro-cas were hardly viewed as "radical" overseas, such recommendations and practices were so in South Africa as they went contrary to the ways in which whites were thinking. This tension between what was deemed as "radical" in South Africa and what others overseas saw as "conservative" steps came to a head in March 1970 when two representatives of the Gereformeerde Kerk in the Netherlands came to visit South Africa in order to better understand the situation. Professor Verkuyl, a leading Dutch theologian, and Jone Bos, secretary of an inter-church aid agency in the Netherlands, were both members of a new Dutch organization known as the Kairos working group which promoted awareness of South Africa's race policies in the Netherlands. Kairos was formed at Naudé's request and was important in mobilizing support for the CI in the Dutch church community.<sup>500</sup> This visit created significant tension for the Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa as their international brothers and sisters began to side more with the pursuits and work of the CI in its challenge of apartheid.

Eventually, through Spro-cas, Naudé came to regard Black Consciousness (BC) as central to the struggle for justice in SA.<sup>501</sup> Although Black Theology argued that the white colonial aspirations destroyed African culture, along with its economic and family life, in the process of "civilizing" or "converting" those indigenous to the

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<sup>497</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 133.

<sup>498</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 133.

<sup>499</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 133.

<sup>500</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 135.

<sup>501</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 139.

land, Naudé recognized that they did not reject Christ.<sup>502</sup> “They found in the gospel, in Christ’s identification with the poor, the suffering and the oppressed, signs of hope. The task of Black Theology was to ‘Africanise’ Christianity, to relate it to the history of black people and to help people recognise that they were equal in God’s eyes... Black Theology is a theology concerned with the future of the black man in the light of Christ as liberator.”<sup>503</sup> As Manas Buthelezi put it:

The fact that Africans, Indians and Coloureds have been collectively referred to as “non-whites” in official terminology suggests that they have the identity of non-persons who exist only as negative shadows of whites. In a theological sense this means that they were created in the image of the white man and not of God. I am aware of the fact that many people never think of the theological significance of calling us non-whites. The practical consequence of this “non-white theology” has been the belief that “non-whites” can be satisfied with the “shadows” of things the white men take for granted when it comes to their needs. Hence “non-whites” have not had a meaningful share in the substance of the power and wealth of the land and they were treated to the shadow of the substance. There was therefore a need for the substitution of a “non-white” theology with a “black theology” or a theology of the image of God in order to put the question of human identity in a proper theological perspective.<sup>504</sup>

John de Gruchy notes:

Theology as [Manas] Buthelezi and others understood it could not be separated from what they believed God was presently doing in history, and therefore from the task of the church in the world today. Black theology was not and is not a theoretical exercise trying to get at philosophical truths. It was reflection on “doing the truth”, that is, on “praxis”, in obedience to the gospel amid the realities of contemporary suffering, racism, oppression, and everything else that denies the lordship of Christ.... It was a theology of protest against apartheid, but it was also one of liberating reconstruction.<sup>505</sup>

This realization led Naudé and the CI to become ever more involved with black led initiatives, playing a supportive role rather than continuing the paternalistic trend of creating projects *for* blacks. Walshe notes that “[a]s a result, the Institute gradually came to the recognition that Christian hope did not essentially reside in transforming the attitudes of those with power and influence. This might help; but the more fundamental process was the investing with power of those Christ came to

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<sup>502</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 141.

<sup>503</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 141-42.

<sup>504</sup> Manas Buthelezi, *The Relevance of Black Theology* (Johannesburg: published in a mimeographed booklet by the Christian Academy of Southern Africa, 1974).

<sup>505</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 155.

serve: the despised and downtrodden, the economically exploited and politically repressed.”<sup>506</sup>

The CI followed its Spro-cas project with Spro-cas II, which introduced more practical programmes that would challenge the ongoing South African reality. Spro-cas II consisted of two practical programmes: one that would challenge the white consciousness of the white community; the other, obviously influenced by its ongoing encounter with Black Consciousness, aimed at helping blacks become aware of their identity and power, encouraging them to develop black leadership and potential, and walking with them as this took shape.<sup>507</sup> “The point we wanted to make to the white community was to say: ‘The time has arrived where the future initiatives of the country can no longer remain in white hands. It has to be an initiative emanating from the black community, and we as whites... must find a new role – a supportive, complementary role, to get rid of the old spirit of paternalism, of white liberalism, to say to the black community: Over to you.’”<sup>508</sup>

The CI’s challenge to the apartheid order, as witnessed through its ongoing programming as well as its unwillingness to give testimony during the Schlegelbusch Commission that began in 1973, which sought to investigate anti-apartheid civil society organizations, included the CI eventually led to its complete banning in 1977.<sup>509</sup> The CI, through this commission, was declared an “Affected Organization” as the government declared it was involved in political action rather than bona fide Christian work.<sup>510</sup> This meant that such “affected organizations” could not receive funding from abroad.

Along with the CI being declared an “Affected Organization”, Naudé was also given a 5-year banning order that prevented him from being able to congregate with more than one person at a time. Ultimately this led to the end of the CI, but not before it demonstrated a significant prophetic witness in South Africa’s history. As James Cochrane put it:

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<sup>506</sup> Walshe, *Church Versus State in South Africa*, 80-81.

<sup>507</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 146.

<sup>508</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 147.

<sup>509</sup> For an account and implications of the trial itself, see Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 147. See also Geneva International Commission of Jurists, ed. *The Trial of Beyers Naudé: Christian Witness and the Rule of Law* (London: Search Press Limited in conjunction with Ravan Press, 1975).

<sup>510</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 107.

The CI gained its unique place in South African church history because it did take the crucial steps. Quite consistently, it also became the first Christian body in South Africa to be totally outlawed.... It was as if the CI was always trying to catch up with the demands of the very gospel upon which it firmly stood, never able to sit back on its loins in proud achievement. This is not surprising, for it heard the gospel through voices (often screams) that the church has usually tended to mute. It saw the gospel in hands, faces and even twisted bodies that were more usually treated from afar, if even recognised.<sup>511</sup>

## Black Consciousness and the emergence of Black Theology

As noted in the previous section, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and its emergence proved to be a significant, thought provoking movement that questioned some of the foundational aspects of South African society and its structure. This was true not only with regards to apartheid and its governing system, but also with regards to white liberal assumptions – even those who also opposed apartheid. At the heart of the BC movement was the unwillingness of blacks to follow the common assumption regarding their supposed role in society and lot in life as determined by whites. BCM questioned the white created and blessed society, which ultimately was formed with the self-interest of whites in mind. Instead, the BCM challenged this social construct by posing an alternative narrative based on black history and experience. The essence of Black Consciousness (BC), in the words of Steve Biko – BC’s most prolific and instrumental leader – “is the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression – the blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude.”<sup>512</sup>

The story of the BCM is far too complex to do it justice here. This story has been recounted elsewhere.<sup>513</sup> This section will simply highlight the way in which BC

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<sup>511</sup> Originally from *South African Outlook*, Jan. 1984. Quoted in Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, 188.

<sup>512</sup> Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Picador Africa, 2004), 101.

<sup>513</sup> For more on the story of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, as well as current commentaries and reflections of it, see Biko, *I Write What I Like*; Gail M. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1978); Mgwebi Snail, "The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa: A Product of the Entire Black World," *Historia Actual Online* 15, no. winter (2008); Nigel Gibson, "Black Consciousness 1977-1987; the Dialectics of Liberation in South Africa," *Africa Today* 35, no. 1 (1988); Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali Basemjondolo*, 1st ed. (New York, N.Y. & Scotsville, South Africa: Palgrave Macmillan; University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2011), 43-70.

continued the trajectory of a prophetic movement in South Africa as it provided an alternative basis – or imagination – from which people would relate – i.e., politics – in the midst of South African apartheid society. The BC movement was particularly significant as it raised questions about the fundamental character of South African society and its structure as well as fostering the emergence of Black Theology, both of which being crucial in the continual challenge and struggle against the oppression of apartheid and its social engineering.

By mid-1960's a void in black leadership and opposition to the apartheid government emerged due to the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-African Congress (PAC) being banned in 1961, forcing them both underground. By 1964, the Rivonia Trial came to a conclusion resulting in the incarceration of many of the key leaders of these organizations. Thus, by the mid-60s, black opposition to apartheid was at its weakest as most of the organizers of such opposition were either arrested, banned, or in exile.

During this time there was an emergence of “Black Power” in the United States during the latter-60's, which affirmed the dignity and experience of “blacks” – and, indeed, being black – in that context.<sup>514</sup> This became a significant influence in the South African context.

BCM arose out of the experiences of black students in multiracial student organizations in South Africa such as the University Christian Movement (UCM) and the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). Besides churches, these student organizations were virtually the only places where students of all races could meet on a basis of formal (but not always practiced) equity.<sup>515</sup> These organizations, however, were still led by and under white control, which reinforced a sense of inadequacy and inferiority among blacks. “White students, moreover, however strong their (rhetorical) commitment to the principle of non-racialism, were, according to their black critics, from the dominant and privileged group, and thus incapable of fully empathizing with the plight of blacks, while being able to retreat when necessary into the stronghold of racial privilege, or to emigrate.”<sup>516</sup> Thus, the need emerged for black students to come together in mutual support regarding their common, and

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<sup>514</sup> See, for example, James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997).

<sup>515</sup> David Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Johannesburg & Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2009), 144.

<sup>516</sup> Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 144.

ongoing, experience of oppression and discrimination towards the realization of their own aspirations.<sup>517</sup> As a result, the South African Student Organization (SASO) emerged in 1968 with BC being its guiding philosophy.

The basic premise of BC thought was to reclaim the dignity and beauty of being black. Apartheid and its depiction of black people as “non-white” created what BC philosophy describes as an identity dependent on “whiteness” as a measuring stick of personhood (i.e., what it means to be a person). As such, the identity of those who were “not-white” depended on that which was “white.” The notion of being “non-white” created a sub-standard understanding of personhood – “non-white” was synonymous with “non-person”; less than white, thus less than human.<sup>518</sup> Instead of this negative based identity, BC sought to reclaim and affirm the positive nature and the dignity of what it meant to be black. “It seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the ‘normal’ which is white... Black Consciousness therefore, takes cognizance of the deliberateness of God’s plan in creating black people black. It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life.”<sup>519</sup> It sought to provide an affirmation that Black is Beautiful.<sup>520</sup> Biko wrote:

If one’s aspiration is whiteness but his pigmentation makes attainment of this impossible, then that person is a non-white. Any man who calls a white man ‘Baas’, and man who serves in the police force or Security Branch is *ipso facto* a non-white. Black people – real black people – are those who can manage to hold their heads high in defiance rather than willingly surrender their souls to the white man.<sup>521</sup>

One of the crucial elements of BC philosophy was the need to overcome the internalized sense of inferiority that was a result of centuries of colonial and racial domination at the hands of whites. Biko, in following the same train of thought as Franz Fanon and Albert Memmi, described how the oppressor’s best tool is the mind of the oppressed – the “colonization of the mind”. Blacks, if they truly wanted to become liberated, had to find a way to liberate their minds. “Colonised minds had to

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<sup>517</sup> See, for example, Allan Boesak’s summary in his *Farewell to Innocence: A Social-Ethical Study of Black Theology and Black Power* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Ravan Press, 1977), 27.

<sup>518</sup> Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 53.

<sup>519</sup> Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 53.

<sup>520</sup> Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 27.

<sup>521</sup> Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 52.



be liberated before apartheid could be effectively challenged.”<sup>522</sup> Blacks, in other words, needed to become “conscientized” in reclaiming the beauty and dignity of being black.

Allan Boesak built on this, describing Black Consciousness as:

...the awareness of black people that their humanity is constituted by their blackness. It means that black people are no longer ashamed that they are black, that they have a black history and a black culture distinct from the history and culture of white people. It means that blacks are determined to be judged no longer by, and to adhere themselves no longer to white values.<sup>523</sup>

Inevitably, this led to a confrontation of power. As we have seen in previous chapters, there has been a long history whereby whites have enjoyed a disproportionately amount of power in the South African context due to its long history of colonialism and apartheid, which both ensured power was placed in white hands. BC, however, in its quest to re-claim the dignity inherent in being black and all that it encapsulates, began to challenge the assumption that whites could somehow provide the means to a dignified life for – on behalf of – blacks; blacks themselves were the only ones who could do this. As such, this led to confrontations regarding who had power, and the form of power that was assumed. It challenged those accustomed to places of authority and leadership – whites – to let go of the reins of power while blacks, on the other hand, needed to realize the power within—the power they already had to which they needed to give external expression.

Thus, the notion of Black Power, which had become a prominent expression and movement in the U.S. in the late 1960’s and 1970’s, found fertile soil and solid footing in South Africa. Boesak explains:

Black Power is the ‘answer to the white power structure’, the answer to racism, degradation, humiliation, exploitation and alienation. Black Power means discovering that the white power structure defines the reality of black life. It means discovering that there is no innocent way of going through life – that innocence which refuses to face reality, which clings to empty promises and makes blacks apathetic. It is learning to discern what really matters.<sup>524</sup>

Concretely, apartheid was the symbolic structure that manifested white power. Boesak continues: “Whatever grandiloquent ideal this ideology may represent for white

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<sup>522</sup> Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 146.

<sup>523</sup> Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 9.

<sup>524</sup> Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 48.

people, for blacks it means bad housing, being underpaid, pass laws, influx-control, migrant labour, group areas, resettlement camps, inequality [sic] before the law, fear, intimidation, white bosses and black informers, condescension and paternalism; in a word, black powerlessness.”<sup>525</sup> Thus, to respond to the powerlessness that apartheid created, a structure that represents white power, those that it excluded had to find an understanding of power within themselves that could confront and challenge such a system.<sup>526</sup>

This had a profound theological impact, especially within the apartheid context. As noted in chapter one, the DRC attempted to provide theological justification for apartheid, thereby making apartheid South Africa a “Christian” nation. Thus, any challenge to its system proved to be a theological challenge in what “Christianity” meant as well. Supporters of apartheid South Africa viewed such challenges as either—at best—a deviation of the gospel and the Christian message as it began to engage with “politics”, or—at worst—unchristian (usually depicted as “communist”). It had to be “unchristian” if it challenged a Christian nation and system. Thus, as alternative *Christian* theological narratives emerged which questioned apartheid and its premises, such as Black Theology and other theologies of liberation, the system of apartheid itself along with its theological justification were brought into question.

Thus, the emergence of the BC movement and the critical lens through which it looked at the South African context inevitably gave rise to Black Theology. Black Theology was a theological paradigm that emerged rooted in the suffering and oppression of black people. Rather than blindly accepting a euro-American theological lens – a “white theology” – Black Theology takes as its starting point the oppressive and unjust realities that blacks, as an oppressed community, have faced.<sup>527</sup> Manas Buthelezi, for example, puts it as such:

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<sup>525</sup> Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 49.

<sup>526</sup> Although it would be interesting and fruitful in its own right, the scope of this particular work makes it unrealistic to provide an in depth exploration into the rise, nature, experience and articulation of Black Power as such. For a more in depth exploration see Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 49. James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, An Original Seabury Paperback, Sp 59 (New York: Seabury Press, 1969). For a more in-depth look at Black Power in the South African context, see Joseph R. Washington, *Black and White Power Subreption* (Boston,: Beacon Press, 1969); and Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*.

<sup>527</sup> Cecil Mzingisi Ngcokovane, for example, explores the uncritical affirmation of Black Theology that has come into being in the U.S. but which, he argues, still operates on capitalist assumptions. This assumption, he argues, if accepted in the South African context, fails to recognize the exploitative nature of capitalism itself, which has been, for South African blacks, the main issue that has caused

... Black Theology is nothing but a methodological formula whose genius consists in paying tribute to the fact that theological honesty cannot but recognise the peculiarity of the black man's situation... If the Gospel means anything, it must save the black man from his own blackness. It must answer his basic existential question "Why did God create me black?"<sup>528</sup>

The emergence of Black Theology in South Africa was deeply influenced by Black Theology that had already found its voice in the U.S. "Black Theology grapples with suffering and oppression, it is a cry unto God for the sake of the people. It believes that in Jesus Christ the total liberation of all people had come."<sup>529</sup> Not only does it take into consideration the oppressive realities of a people who are in search of liberation, but it takes that reality as its starting point.<sup>530</sup> As Boesak notes, "... liberation is not merely part of the gospel, nor merely 'one of the keywords' of the gospel, it is content and framework of the whole biblical message."<sup>531</sup>

In this way Black Theology flipped apartheid ideology on its head. Whereas apartheid and its ideological and theological justification began from the culturally privileged vantage point of whites and then worked its logical conclusions downwards to the rest of ("non-white") society, Black Theology began, rather, from the context of those who were suffering and who were being oppressed. Thus it demonstrated and called into the question the very logic of apartheid and its assumption regarding power, theological justification, and so forth. It served as a demonstration of apartheid's fallen character and abhorrent understanding. In this way, Desmond Tutu could regularly inform those who were on the side of and who represented the fallenness of apartheid that they have lost. Tutu would then invite them to join the

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much of their suffering and pain. Thus, Ngcokovane argues that "any social-cultural analysis of the origins and development of Black theology in the world, especially in South Africa must of necessity take into serious account the historical materialist background" (Cecil Mzingisi Ngcokovane, "The Social-Cultural Analysis of the Origins and Development of Black Theology," *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 1, no. 2: 13).

<sup>528</sup> Manas Buthelezi, "An African Theology or a Black Theology," in *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, ed. Basil Moore (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1973), 34-35.

<sup>529</sup> In this way I do not think that Victor Masilo Molobi is correct when he states, in summarizing Simon Maimela's understanding of Black Theology, that "Black Theology turned the gospel into an instrument of liberation..." (Victor Masilo Molobi, "The Past and Future of Black Theology in South Africa: In Discussion with Maimela," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 36, no. July [2010]: 9). Rather than *turning* the gospel into an instrument of liberation, Black Theology realized the emancipatory or liberative element of the gospel itself. Recognizing and interpreting the gospel as such, therefore, challenges the contextual reality of injustice and oppression. Put simply, the gospel has always been an instrument of liberation. It did not need to be turned into one, as Molobi's statement suggests.

<sup>530</sup> James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Rev. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), 16-35.

<sup>531</sup> Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 19-20.

right side – God’s side; the side that will eventually prevail; the side of those who sought a different reality than that which apartheid created and maintained. “You have already lost!” he would say. “Let us say to you nicely: You have already lost! We are inviting you to come and join the winning side! Your cause is unjust. You are defending what is fundamentally indefensible, because it is evil. It is evil without question. It is immoral. It is immoral without question. It is unchristian. Therefore, you will bite the dust! And you will bite the dust comprehensively.”<sup>532</sup>

The BC movement and Black Theology proved to be a substantial prophetic challenge in that people who were dedicated to this perspective and its theology lived in ways that no longer accepted the inevitability of apartheid and its social engineering. Rather than continuing along with the assumption of apartheid and its system that, historically, created a sense of inferiority among blacks, which thus substantiated and perpetuated the patronizing ideological myth that whites were required to “oversee” or “be the guardians for” those who were not capable of taking care of themselves, the BC movement and Black Theology fostered an alternative philosophical and theological paradigm that a) was based on the beauty and dignity of being black, and b) exposed apartheid and its ideology as that which was truly fallen and misguided.

#### Institute for Contextual Theology and the ongoing pursuit towards Liberation

Thanks in large part to the ongoing and increased awareness, including a theological awareness, of the injustice of apartheid and its thin sociological and theological justification, pressure against its socially engineered system and its undergirding theology continued. Increasingly more people were willing – although still relatively few whites – to openly and overtly challenge apartheid and its rule. The consequences, however, were severe as the apartheid government continued to increase the tenacity by which it sought to maintain its rule.

By the end of the 1970’s, the apartheid government banned many so-called “affected organizations”, which included most of the organizations that had any kind of connection to the Black Consciousness movement. This included, as noted earlier,

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<sup>532</sup> These were the words of Desmond Tutu as quoted in John Allen, *Rabble-Rouser for Peace: The Authorized Biography of Desmond Tutu* (New York, N.Y.: Free Press, 2006), 291.

the CI, Beyers Naudé, along with many others such as the Black People's Convention (BCP), South African Student's Organization (SASO), Black Parent's Association (BPA), Black Women's Federation, and the Union of Black Journalists. But the flame that Black Consciousness ignited, along with the tragic events of the youth uprising in Soweto in 1976, proved to fuel a more militant resolve in challenging apartheid's rule. As Nelson Mandela noted in the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Biko's death, Biko – and I would add the BC movement – was the spark that lit a veld fire across South Africa.<sup>533</sup> “This was true enough: BC, in the short time of its existence, had indeed infused young blacks with a new determination not to submit any longer to the humiliations inflicted on their elders.”<sup>534</sup>

In 1981, the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) emerged on the South African scene. The ICT emerged due to the realization that much of Christian theology in South Africa had been imported (even, to some degree, Black Theology), especially from the “global north”. As such, this imported theology focused on issues that were, in many respects, foreign to the South African context. Along with the imported theologies came the tensions and/or conflicts that emerged from them. Such tensions and/or conflicts did not arise out of South African contextual realities but were foreign issues and historical realities brought to South Africa. As such, these largely imported theologies did not speak to nor emerged from the contextual reality of South Africa.<sup>535</sup> Thus, the ICT emerged as an attempt to focus on and create a contextually aware theology – a theology that arose from the context of apartheid South Africa.<sup>536</sup>

One of the realities, notes Albert Nolan who was a longstanding staff person at the ICT, was that theology in South Africa in the 1980s – the theologies that had been imported – did not deal with racism in general, let alone the form of racism that existed in the South African context.<sup>537</sup> “We needed a theology that looked into our context; a theology that would look into our questions. We didn't have it.”<sup>538</sup> Thus, the ICT focused on South African contextual questions and issues that faced the Christian church.

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<sup>533</sup> Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 150.

<sup>534</sup> Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 150.

<sup>535</sup> Albert Nolan, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 7, 2015.

<sup>536</sup> Nolan, interview by author.

<sup>537</sup> Nolan, interview by author.

<sup>538</sup> Nolan, interview by author.

At first, there was discussion about possibly having this institute arise out of the University of Cape Town (UCT). But, upon further discussion, the decision was made to make it an independent institute because of the desire for it to represent the thinking of the people, not of academic theologians.<sup>539</sup> This proved to be crucial for the life of the ICT. This was one of the first ways in which it could/would position itself socially. As such, this decision positioned the ICT as an entity that would focus not on the theology from the academy but rather on a “people’s theology” – a theology that would arise from “the people”.

This decision regarding its philosophical location determined its *modus operandi*. Rather than seeking to “educate” “the people”, which is a very top—down, one directional approach whereby “the teacher” determines the agenda along with what gets taught, the ICT, rather, would seek to learn from “the people” – what they thought and how they understood their faith in their context.<sup>540</sup> The ICT, notes Nolan, would not go to “the people” with answers in what they should believe. The ICT would not assume a theological truth or perspective and then try to have it legitimized. Rather, the ICT would begin by listening – listening to those who were marginalized, victimized, and oppressed as to what they were experiencing, thinking, and what questions they were asking as a result. They would seek to understand their faith from within their particular context.

The ICT was particularly interested in bringing together those who were Christian and those who were interested in fighting apartheid.<sup>541</sup> The work of the ICT proved to be revolutionary as they gathered people together to listen to their grievances, the ways in which people were suffering and being oppressed, as they explored ways of walking with one another in challenging the assumptions and the rule of apartheid. The ICT tried to understand how “the people” saw things and then tried to help them formulate their understandings.<sup>542</sup> It was, after all, through the work of the ICT that the KD was written.

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<sup>539</sup> Nolan, interview by author.

<sup>540</sup> Here we can see the influence of Antonio Gramsci, an Italian philosopher, political theorist, and revolutionary, and his concept of the “organic intellectual”. For more on Gramsci see: Antonio Gramsci and Lynne Lawner, *Letters from Prison* (London: Cape, 1975); Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 1st ed. (New York: International Publishers, 1972); Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process* (Oxford Oxfordshire: Clarendon Press, 1981); and Giuseppe Fiori, *Antonio Gramsci: Life of a Revolutionary* (London,: NLB, 1970).

<sup>541</sup> Nolan, interview by author.

<sup>542</sup> Nolan, interview by author.

The intent of the ICT was to provide an alternative theology that would challenge apartheid theology. M. Malusi Mpumlwana noted in the forward of Nolan's book, *God in South Africa: the Challenge of the Gospel*, "There needs to be a different message emanating from theology to expose the lie that identifies organized and violent dehumanization with God's will for our people."<sup>543</sup>

One such example was the apartheid government's use of Romans 13. The government fed an assumption that "if you were a Christian, you had to obey the government. If you did not obey the government, then you were not a Christian (and most probably an atheist!)." <sup>544</sup> The apartheid government made sure that Romans 13 was translated into every language in South Africa, and that it was printed and distributed to every school in the country. <sup>545</sup> "School children would read this and would get the idea that this is what it meant to be a Christian." <sup>546</sup>

Thus, the KD emerged as an explicit challenge – a challenge not to the government, but to the Christian church – that had, in so many ways, either legitimated the ways in which the government co-opted theology or stood idly by whilst this was happening. What became apparent, however, as the ICT gathered people together to wrestle with these increasingly important and urgent questions was that this was also an *opportunity* for the church to explore what it *ought* to be within the given situation. <sup>547</sup>

Already by the late 1970s and early 1980s there was a surge in Liberation Theology which became rooted within the South African context. Indeed, many recognized how BC and the Black Theology that emerged from it participated more broadly in the larger Liberation Theology project that was emerging more generally in the global south. Boesak, for example, notes how "Black Theology is a theology of liberation.... Black Theology believes that liberation is not only 'part of' the gospel, or 'consistent with' the gospel, it is the context and framework of the gospel of Jesus Christ." <sup>548</sup>

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<sup>543</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, viii.

<sup>544</sup> Nolan, interview by author.

<sup>545</sup> Nolan, interview by author.

<sup>546</sup> Nolan, interview by author.

<sup>547</sup> Nolan, interview by author.

<sup>548</sup> Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 9. Nolan had already, for example, written a popular book entitled *Jesus Before Christianity: the Gospel of Liberation* (South Africa: David Philip Publisher, 1976) which had been translated into several different languages.

Although never one of the directors of the ICT, Albert Nolan became one of the main theological proponents behind the ICT as well as of Liberation Theology in South Africa in general. Nolan not only demonstrated his dedication to the processes of the ICT – that of contextual theology – but he also provided much of the theological framework for the manner in which the ICT worked. He gave voice to a new theology that was emerging during this time; a new way in which to understand the gospel that was emerging out of the “purifying fires of the township.”<sup>549</sup> Given his importance in the life of the ICT in particular and of South African Liberation Theology in general, especially as it continued the trajectory of Prophetic Theology in South Africa, it will be helpful to explore Nolan’s theology, particularly as found in his book *God in South Africa*. Understanding his argument and the context to which it gives voice will help to better understand the general assumptions behind that which was described as “Prophetic Theology” in the latter parts of apartheid. I will come back to critically engage Nolan’s theology in chapter five as we explore the way in which Prophetic Theology shifted from pre-1994 to post apartheid. For now I will simply summarize the character of Nolan’s theology and the way it fed the struggle against apartheid in the 1980s.

Nolan can be described as a Liberation theologian. Thus, we can forgo much of the more basic aspects of his theology that is generally typical of Liberation Theology.<sup>550</sup> For Nolan, as for Liberation Theologians in general, the gospel – the good news of Jesus Christ – is understood as that which would be positive news for the contextual realities of those who are suffering and oppressed. Such news also challenges those who benefit from the system that causes such suffering and oppression and who would like to maintain power, rule, and privilege. Thus, not everyone would experience the “good news of Jesus Christ” as good news. Such news does not sit on the fence of indecision or controversy. It takes sides – it sides with the poor and oppressed.<sup>551</sup>

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<sup>549</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 5.

<sup>550</sup> For other readings that help understand Liberation Theology, see Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988); Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*; Dorothee Sölle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978); Leonardo Boff, *Liberating Grace* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979); Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976).

<sup>551</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 13.



Jesus and not doctrine, therefore, is God's message to the world. "...[T]he good news is about the practice of Jesus, the wonderful work of God that was manifested in the practice of Jesus."<sup>552</sup> This is best expressed as having "the mind of Christ"—remembering what the meaning of Jesus Christ was contextually as he tackled the problems of his times. Nolan, therefore, suggests that "Gospel" is understood as what God is doing *in South Africa today* in light of what God has done in the past.<sup>553</sup>

This Gospel or "good news" message, argues Nolan, is about salvation from sin.<sup>554</sup> Sin, however, in Liberation Theology, is understood not simply as some form of moral impurity. Instead, sin also encompasses the structural injustice and oppression in society. Ultimately, sin is something that offends God.<sup>555</sup> It goes against the grain of God's created universe.

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<sup>552</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 17-18.

<sup>553</sup> After making these assertions, Nolan then engages with the question of incarnation. Although, due to the scope of this project, only a few words will suffice in highlighting the problematic way in which he deals with this question.

In his first chapter, Nolan seeks to demonstrate the importance of contextualization when it comes to understanding the nature and meaning of the gospel – the gospel cannot be understood separately from the particular context in which the message is read. If it is to be "good news" it must be good news within a particular time and place. This leads Nolan to argue that it is, in fact, unbiblical to seek to "apply" or "import" certain principles that may be foreign into another context. This, he argues, has been the Christian problem in South Africa – a foreign message has been imported rather than emerging from within a particular context. Nolan thus states that the "process of incarnating the word of God is simply unbiblical. It is not we who must make the gospel incarnate in our situation, God does it and is already busy doing it.... You do not incarnate good news into a situation, good news arises out of a situation. The prophets did not 'apply' their prophetic message to their times, they had it revealed to them through the signs of their times" (Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 22).

It seems to me that this portrayal of the incarnation and the manner in which "good news" arises is unfortunate as it unnecessarily creates a dichotomy from where truth can arise. Although I understand and gravitate towards Nolan's overall argument, in this case, if we followed his argument to its logical conclusion, the incarnation of God through Jesus would be problematic as God in Jesus embodies what Nolan describes as "applied principles" *for* a particular context rather than arising from a particular context. Put another way, Jesus becomes an imported solution within a foreign context. However, it was precisely because Israel had gone astray that Jesus became incarnate in order to demonstrate (witness) and remind Israel about God's will for them. Put simply, if we followed Nolan's argument, we would be forced to say that the incarnation of Jesus was an inappropriate method in making known God's truth. But, in coming to remind Israel (and the world) about God's desire, Jesus became part of their story; demonstrating the practicality of God's desire for them in their context. A dichotomy, in other words, between God's will and their contextual reality did not exist. It is precisely through the act of incarnation that one no longer exists "outside", but is now part of the community's story and therefore contextual reality. As James Cone reminds us: "The scandal [of the gospel] is that the gospel means liberation, that this liberation comes to the poor, and that it gives them the strength and the courage to break the conditions of servitude. This is what the Incarnation means. God in Christ comes to the weak and the helpless, and becomes one with them, taking their condition of oppression as his own and thus transforming their slave-existence into a liberated existence" (Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 71).

<sup>554</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 31.

<sup>555</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 31.

But, the ability to see something that is wrong – as sin – is also to recognize the need and ability to do something about it. Thus, Nolan noted how, if a system such as apartheid creates and causes injustice and oppression, then something must be done about it. Being guilty of sin rests on both those who construct and uphold the unjust system as well as those who, through willful blindness or a false consciousness, allow the system to continue. The latter, argued Nolan, is the sin of omission.<sup>556</sup> Thus Nolan concluded:

The personal and the social are two dimensions that are present in every sin. All sin is both personal and social at the same time. All sin is personal in the sense that only individuals can commit sin, only individuals can be guilty, only individuals can be sinners. However all sins also have a social dimension because sins have social consequences (they affect other people), sins become institutionalised and systematised in the structures, laws and customs of a society, and sins are committed in a particular society that shapes and influences the sinner.<sup>557</sup>

The “good news” of salvation through Jesus Christ is, therefore, also the pursuit of salvation from the injustice and oppression of the principalities and powers that bring into being structural sin. Thus, the willingness to confront such a system of oppression becomes another expression along the same spirit as that of Jesus and the salvation he came to bring. This spirit, however, proved to be a threat to the system of his day.<sup>558</sup> This demonstrates, argued Nolan, how Jesus’ message was not, as is often assumed, simply a religious one. Jesus’ message, as it challenged the Roman system, was deeply political; just as the Roman imperial system itself was both religious and political. Nolan notes:

He [Jesus] wanted to replace it [the Roman system] with something he called the rule of God. The Romans would not have understood this but what was clear to them was that here they had an even more radical troublemaker and political rebel. He wanted, it seemed to them, to overthrow the collaborating Jewish authorities and their whole system of law and order and to make himself the Messiah or King of the Jews. That would indeed undermine the whole system of Roman peace. It could not be tolerated.<sup>559</sup>

Jesus’ life and message was, therefore, a response to this ongoing reality that caused ongoing suffering and oppression to the people of Israel. As Jesus confronted

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<sup>556</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 41-42.

<sup>557</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 43-44.

<sup>558</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 60.

<sup>559</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 61.

this injustice, and as he paid the ultimate price in doing so, he became, argues Nolan, the representative of all oppressed people in all time, including the suffering people of South Africa.<sup>560</sup> In turning to the South African condition of apartheid, Nolan noted the many comparisons between the system of oppression and injustice during Jesus' time with that experienced under apartheid. Apartheid was also a system that caused suffering. It was a system that was based on colonialism, which ultimately, he argues, is a means towards capital, wealth, and privilege. Furthermore, it was a means of maintaining capital, wealth, and privilege by subjugating others, either through force or co-option and persuasion, towards this purpose.<sup>561</sup> If we do not respond in challenging such a system, notes Nolan, then not only are we guilty of the "original sin" of inheriting such an unjust system but we are also guilty of maintaining it by either overtly supporting it or allowing it to continue through our inaction. What's more, if we do not respond to the social realities we do not participate in God's salvific plan from sin in all of its dimensions.<sup>562</sup> "This kind of 'Christianity' is not Biblical. It takes one aspect of salvation, the need to be saved from individual guilt, and then re-interprets the whole Bible in terms of that need so that everything else in the Bible, everything that is concrete, material, political and down to earth, is 'spiritualised.'"<sup>563</sup>

Understanding salvation in such a holistic way, however, introduces an alternative language of power – it challenges all the other forms of power that pretends to offer safety and security but that instead oppresses; a form of language that the apartheid state (perhaps States in general) used (use) often. Whereas power comes from God, States abuse this power because of sin.<sup>564</sup> "Power is a service when it is exercised for the benefit of everyone. The power that serves is a power that is shared by all. The power that dominates cannot be shared."<sup>565</sup> And this, frankly, demonstrates the revolutionary character of power – Godly power is such insofar as it is shared and serves one another. Those who abuse power and who do not want to share it feel threatened by those who want to participate in its shared manifestation.<sup>566</sup>

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<sup>560</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 66.

<sup>561</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 69-73.

<sup>562</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 108.

<sup>563</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 109.

<sup>564</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 111.

<sup>565</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 112.

<sup>566</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 113-14.

Nolan argued that it is precisely this understanding of power – Godly power – that gave hope, both during Jesus’ time as well as in the South African context. “It was an aspiration which the poor associated with the reign of God, namely, liberation from their sufferings.”<sup>567</sup> And here it is worth quoting Nolan extensively:

Hence his [Jesus’] work of healing the sick and feeding the hungry, and his insistence that what pleases God is to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked and visit the sick and those in prison (Mt 25:31-46). His own agenda is to see the downtrodden free, open the eyes of the blind and open the doors of the prisons while giving hope or good news to the poor (Lk 4:18-19). It is the poor, the hungry and the miserable who are blessed because the reign of God belongs to them (Lk 6:20-21). The liberation of the poor from sickness and guilt is the work of God, an act of salvation and a sign that *God is beginning to reign* (Lk 11:20; Mt 11:2-5; Mk 5:34; 10:52; Lk 17:19; 18:42; in the Greek of the New Testament ‘to heal’ and ‘to save’ is the same word)... In the first place what this shows is that Jesus did not think of the reign of God as something that comes only on the last day. It is a *process* that begins now with the work of ploughing, sowing and planting, and reaches completion with the work of harvesting. Nor is there any reason for assigning the time of harvesting to another world at the end of time. The project, including the harvesting, is not portrayed as the work of God alone.<sup>568</sup>

Power – God’s power – requires, argued Nolan, human participation. It is collaborative. And it is something in which we share. This does not mean that God is not powerful beyond human participation. Rather, Nolan simply wanted to highlight that God prefers to work through human collaboration. This is not, however, the type of power that people experienced, especially during apartheid. The power demonstrated during that time was not a collaborative, shared experience, but an oppressive, dehumanizing form of power. It was a “power over” as opposed to a “power with”. This is the difference, for Nolan, between top-down forms of power – domineering power – instead of a bottom-up understanding of power – or the power of the people. “What we are dealing with, then,” noted Nolan, “is not the power of domination and oppression but people’s power.”<sup>569</sup>

It was, ironically, through people’s experience of this alternative form of power that provided hope, even in the midst of pain and suffering. This experience also brought a realization that hope would not be found within the system itself, but through a collective who, even though it brought great suffering, would no longer tolerate and live according to the state’s social engineering project. The more the state would try to entrench itself, the more it clarified the ideals by which people actually

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<sup>567</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 127.

<sup>568</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 128-29.

<sup>569</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 164.

wanted to live; it deepened the desire for something else along with the motivation to begin living according to these other ideals.<sup>570</sup>

Nolan outlined some of these ideals. The first one he described is that of *participation*. This, argued Nolan, means participation in the whole process of decision-making in and for South Africa. “They do not want to be objects who receive concessions, they want to be subjects who decide with others what is to be done or not done.”<sup>571</sup> Nolan even goes as far as stating:

The reason why this is such an enormously hopeful sign [that more and more South Africans who have been oppressed are becoming active subjects and co-creators with one another in a common future] is that we can be quite sure that our future will not be oppressive and alienating. In other words the one thing we need not fear for the future is the kind of take-over whereby another group of people simply replaces the present rulers and maintains the same type of system so that people (of whatever colour) are manipulated as objects. That possibility is gone forever. Our people will no longer let anyone of any shade of colour treat them as mere objects. Any future government will have to be answerable to all the people otherwise it will simply not be allowed to govern.<sup>572</sup>

Another ideal that Nolan highlighted is that of *organization*. The apartheid system, he noted, operated according to a system based on excessive individualism; a policy based on “divide and rule”. This stirred the people to find ways in which to organize themselves into people’s organizations that countered such methods.

The third ideal that Nolan highlighted is that of *democracy*. The more apartheid sought to extinguish the voice and desire of the people, dictating the manner in which the country would go, the more it fueled the desire of the people to already embody the democratization they so desired. “But democracy has come to mean much more than being allowed to vote in general elections every few years. A form of grassroots democracy is being developed in the organisations of the people. People are learning to make democratic decisions at every level and in every sphere of life. People who have never had any part in the decision-making processes of the system are being given a say in how the struggle against the system is to be conducted.”<sup>573</sup> Nolan here noted his belief that such participation in intentionally democratized

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<sup>570</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 141-42.

<sup>571</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 144.

<sup>572</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 144-45. It is important to highlight Nolan’s depiction of the churches as not being democratic institutions. This becomes important when we begin to ponder the ecclesiological form assumed by Prophetic Theologians and the people in general, especially when we investigate other ecclesiologies such as an Anabaptist ecclesiology.

<sup>573</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 149.

organizations prepared the people in being conscientised and politicized, and thus ready, for when democracy would eventually arrive.

The embodiment of these ideals provided hope as people struggled against apartheid and its system. Unfortunately, for several different reasons that we will explore in the next two chapters, Nolan's optimism in how these ideals would shape the way of the people has been tested and has largely failed to take shape in the post-apartheid political dispensation.

It is worth highlighting, however, how the ideals noted above proved to be the experience of hope during "the struggle". This must be explicitly noted for two reasons: a) as Dorothee Sölle puts it: "Hope lies within the struggle;"<sup>574</sup> and b) the struggle towards justice restores humanity from alienation, isolation, and individualism. "It restores *ubuntu* (humanness) and the experience of being a living member of a living body."<sup>575</sup>

Thus, for Nolan, "the struggle" means the yearning for liberation that has been translated into action.<sup>576</sup> "The struggle is the opposite of the system. In the townships what people are concerned about is not your ancestry or the colour of your skin but whether you are on the side of the system or on the side of the struggle."<sup>577</sup> What's more, Nolan noted how, in participating in "the struggle", one experiences a certain religious aura through it: the celebration of hope, the experience of community, the demonstration of self-sacrifice, the total commitment, the courage, the discipline and the willingness to live and to die for the struggle.<sup>578</sup> Participation in "the struggle" was to participate in a community that envisioned an alternative reality and began to embody that reality and its politics thereby demonstrating (witnessing) an alternative community in the face of the oppressive system in which they were caught.

Being part of "the struggle" provided an alternative ecclesial experience. Those who were part of the struggle saw a community that was willing to challenge the oppressive principalities and powers in search of a reality based on equality, justice, and living rightly with one another – i.e., a new politics. This provided an

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<sup>574</sup> Dorothee Sölle and Shirley A. Cloyes, *To Work and to Love: A Theology of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 161.

<sup>575</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 159.

<sup>576</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 157.

<sup>577</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 157.

<sup>578</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 160-61.

experience of the true church.<sup>579</sup> It provided an experience of community and a community in solidarity with one another (i.e., sharing in one another's joys and sorrows); it provided a joint purpose and reason for being; it was a community who worshipped together; it provided an experience of an alternative understanding of power – power understood as “power with” not “power over”; and it provided the necessary support in overcoming fear in order to act with one another with confidence and courage in already enacting the reality and the future dreamt about.<sup>580</sup> In so many ways “the struggle” provided an experience of the “already-but-not-yet” experience of God's kingdom and the church that is to be a sign of it.

This is not to say that “the struggle” was perfect. Indeed it was not. It too had some who were willing to use power for their own personal needs rather than the needs of the people. There were those who were willing to use power, intimidation, and violence over others to ensure everyone was “toeing the line”. This became more apparent in the latter part of the 1980s. Nolan's portrayal of “the struggle” can be seen as quite idealistic in this regard.

For Nolan, the experience of “the struggle” as an expression of an alternative ecclesiology raises the question of the relationship between salvation and liberation. Are they one and the same? Or are they different?

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<sup>579</sup> In 1985, Beyers Naudé, for example, had a televised conversation with Dorothee Sölle. The purpose was to bring these two influential people who had become icons of liberation theology through the way in which they were challenging the systems and theologies of oppression in their respective contexts. During this conversation, Naudé makes a comment similar to that of Nolan regarding an alternative ecclesiology. Naudé says, “If we mean by the church mainly the institution, the structure, the visible, traditional symbols, then I believe that the church, in that sense, will experience one crisis after another, until it comes to the recognition, understanding, that the church, in the real sense of the word, is where the people of God are, where life is being discovered again, the true meaning of love, of human community, of mutual concern for one another, of caring of people, of seeking true meaningful relationship, understanding between people, not only between Christians but between all people” (C. F. Beyers Naudé and Dorothee Sölle, *Hope for Faith: A Conversation*, Risk Book Series [Geneva, Switzerland; Grand Rapids, Michigan: World Council of Churches; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985], 21). In light of this, Naudé is ultimately led to ask what is wrong with our understanding of church whereby we experience the true meaning of church outside of the walls of our institutional church?

<sup>580</sup> For example, Nolan states that in “the struggle” power is not mob rule but that of grassroots democracy and likewise that there was no spirit of revenge in the struggle, but rather in setting right what was wrong and not upon imitating the spirit of the oppressor (Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 164). And yet, as we have learned since – especially through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – atrocious acts occurred amongst those who were involved in “the struggle”, especially against those who were considered as informants. One of the most high profile examples would be that of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela who through her Mandela United Football Club terrorized Soweto in the 1980s.

But here we must remember the context in which Nolan was writing. The point Nolan was trying to make was simply the hypocrisy in which “the struggle” and some of its activities were described as violent whereas the apartheid system and its activities were not. Apartheid's activities were described as “keeping the peace” and maintaining “law and order”. This, as Nolan rightly wanted to highlight, was simply hypocritical.

Nolan begins to respond to this question by noting and asking why the notions of salvation and liberation are indeed understood separately in the first place. Apartheid, he noted, has tried to drive a wedge between religion and politics, “or rather between religion and the politics of resistance.”<sup>581</sup> The experience in the townships, on the other hand, has assumed an understanding that if *they* do not work at building the kingdom now, nothing will ever change. In this way the distinction that theologians maintain regarding the relationship of salvation and liberation as that of total and partial is problematic. Such a distinction maintains the “pie-in-the-sky” assumptions regarding salvation, which continues to be out of grasp and separate from the concrete, social realities that people experience.

Nolan, therefore, argued that the distinction is not in the “total or partial” but in whether God is introduced into the equation or not. This he describes as the religious dimension as to whether God is introduced into the picture. The very notion of liberation, argued Nolan, is consistent and compatible with the vision of the gospel. But, “... introducing God into the picture *makes a world of difference*, not only to our picture but also to our practice.”<sup>582</sup> With the introduction of God into the picture, it not only affects our practice, but it also introduces transcendence – that the pursuit of liberation goes beyond some boundary of limitation.<sup>583</sup>

The experience of being freed or liberated from something that was closed, fixed, frozen or narrow is an experience of transcendence. The struggle itself is an experience of going beyond the straitjacket of the system with its blindness, alienation, separation, racism, individualism and apathy.... God’s voice is the call of transcendence that challenges us to go further, to do more, to try harder, to change our lives, to venture out into new areas and into the unknown. It is a liberating experience. God is out there calling us to move beyond the system, beyond sin, beyond suffering, beyond our narrow and limited ideas of what is possible.<sup>584</sup>

Thus Nolan drew a very direct connection between transcendence and eschatology, defining the two as that which is an inviting horizon.<sup>585</sup> “But *at this moment* our horizon, our *eschaton*, our salvation,” says Nolan, “is the liberation of South Africa from this particular system of slavery and sin.”<sup>586</sup> It is when we

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<sup>581</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 185.

<sup>582</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 186.

<sup>583</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 187.

<sup>584</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 187-88.

<sup>585</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 188.

<sup>586</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 189.



experience liberation as salvation that we experience God's grace. God's grace and salvation, therefore, is ultimately that which "comes from below" – from those who experience salvation as liberation and vice versa. As Metz reminds us: "The God of the Christian gospel is, after all, not a God of conquerors, but a God of slaves."<sup>587</sup>

In chapter five we will look more critically into Nolan's argument as we analyze "Prophetic Theology" more thoroughly and ponder its trajectory and, frankly, its virtual disappearance after 1994. We will explore the character and some of its underlying assumptions that allowed for this to happen. At this point, suffice to say that Nolan provided a much-needed theological perspective that continued to feed the embodiment of an alternative political practice in the face of the apartheid government and its form of politics. His work, and that of the ICT, was but another expression of a theological expression of a prophetic movement in response to the oppressive and unjust powers and realities within the South African context.

## *Conclusion*

This chapter began by looking at the KD's constructive appeal for a "Prophetic Theology", which tried to prod the Church in South Africa in becoming active participants in the struggle against the apartheid regime. The KD itself, however, did not arise out of thin air. This chapter has attempted to demonstrate the larger history of what can be described as a prophetic movement – a movement that has provided an alternative politics as it challenged the oppressive practices of the colonial powers and then the apartheid system. Such an alternative political expression emerged from the time of the early missionaries and continued to the writing of the KD and on until the demise of apartheid. The examples highlighted in this chapter reveal the truth of Alasdair MacIntyre's claim that "to protest was once to bear witness *to* something and only as a consequence of that allegiance to bear witness *against* something else."<sup>588</sup> Thus, as we can see, prophetic theology and its historical witness was not simply challenging the injustice of colonialism and

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<sup>587</sup> Johannes Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, A Crossroad Book (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 71.

<sup>588</sup> Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 71.

apartheid but already enacting – embodying – a different set of assumptions (dignity, respect, love, justice) desired in society.

4.

## Post-apartheid political theology

In the last three chapters we have attempted to understand the way in which theology and politics have interacted in the South African context using the *Kairos Document* as a platform to help paint the picture with broad strokes. First, we looked at a form of theology that ended up being an ally with the state and its mode of governance. Generally this form of theology sought to influence the government as it attempted to help determine and shape the social order of the country. This the KD described as State Theology. Second, we looked at “Church Theology” which sought to avoid any form of political involvement, understanding such involvement as being outside or contrary to the gospel and its message. And third, we looked at “Prophetic Theology” which, in the face of oppression and suffering, sought to stand up for the most vulnerable and oppressed in society, challenging the social and government structures – i.e., challenging the status quo – that maintained such realities so that justice, equality, and ultimately true peace may become a reality for all. Thus we have used the categories that the KD provided and then attempted to demonstrate how these reflected certain traditions that emerged during the history of the church’s struggle in South Africa.

The previous chapter also demonstrated how even though Christianity arrived into the South African scene hand-in-hand with the colonial powers, thus embodying a form of “State” or “Church Theology”, there emerged a prophetic theological movement, which has existed throughout the church’s history in South Africa. Indeed, the previous chapter highlighted how the authenticity and influence of Prophetic Theology, which questioned the inequality, injustice, and oppression at the hands of white colonial powers which included the emergence of apartheid and its social engineering, arose not simply from what was articulated but from the politics or practices that were embodied which countered the social constructs of white

dominated society and its form of politics. Indeed, this was one of the main differences between “Church Theology” and “Prophetic Theology”. “Church Theology”, as we noted in chapter two, also made pronouncements against the social engineering taking root in South Africa. Its practices, however, did not mirror what was articulated and repudiated. “Prophetic Theology”, on the other hand, embodied a counter-politic – an alternative way of being in the South African context – that went against the logic and politics of colonialism and apartheid. In this way “Prophetic Theology” was much more than simply “speaking truth to power”. It embraced and enacted an alternative form of power in the midst of the colonial and apartheid governmental powers.

The year 1994 is significant as South Africa held its first democratic elections which marked the official demise of apartheid. It marks the beginning of a different era. Julian Brown notes: “This moment represents the culmination of a struggle that was not only against racism, but simultaneously for a new social and political order.”<sup>589</sup> What implications did this have regarding the political theology landscape in South Africa? Would the KD and its depiction of the different forms of theology be relevant in a post-apartheid South Africa? In particular, how did this affect “Prophetic Theology” as it came to be so focused as a challenge and response to apartheid? What happened to “Prophetic Theology” after apartheid’s demise?

This chapter will explore these questions as it explores the political theology landscape in South Africa after 1994. This chapter will inevitably focus on two theological trends that emerged after the demise of apartheid in response to South Africa’s new political dispensation: 1) a theology of reconstruction and/or nation building<sup>590</sup> and 2) Public Theology. Although related, these two theological trends have significantly shaped theological reflection after 1994. They have emerged as attempts of continuing to be socio-politically engaged: “theology of reconstruction and/or nation building” being more constructive in its political engagement; Public Theology being an attempt to engage publicly out of theological foundations and motivation. These two trends are not separate. There is overlap between the two. Identifying these two streams, however, helps to understand the manner in which the

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<sup>589</sup> Julian Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens: On Dissent and the Possibility of Politics* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana Media [Pty] Ltd, 2015), 35.

<sup>590</sup> Although one may argue that there are differences or specific nuances between theologies of reconstruction than those of nation building, in this work these two will be used interchangeably.

church and theologians have sought to be engaged in South Africa's new political dispensation. Exploring these two trends also provides insight into the trajectory of "Prophetic Theology" after apartheid in light of the new challenges that exist.

### *The Beast is destroyed!*

In April 27, 1994, the long walk to freedom<sup>591</sup> had seemingly been accomplished! On this day the first general elections were held in South Africa. This was the first time everyone in South Africa – black and white – had the opportunity to vote in a democratic election and elect the leader the majority of the people wanted. Not surprisingly, Nelson Mandela became the first President of South Africa's new political dispensation. Thus was born the democratic South Africa – the new South Africa.

Understandably, there was a sigh of relief. The beast that was apartheid had been slain. Its reign of terror had come to an end. Although people instinctively knew that a lot of work lay ahead in order to undo what apartheid had created, a new era could now begin. Optimism abounded. The time had now come when South Africans of all colours and tribes could begin to write their new, common future. The image of a rainbow nation became a symbol of this new, common, and joint vision.<sup>592</sup> And new opportunities to come together, both as a nation as well as internationally, began almost immediately. In 1995 South Africa hosted the Rugby World Cup, which they won. Such an event saw South Africa – black and white – come together to celebrate. It gave the perception that reconciliation and integration were going to come naturally and seamlessly.<sup>593</sup> The need for a "Prophetic Theology" whose primary role, it was assumed, was to confront the injustices and oppression of apartheid and its government was no longer needed as the beast had now been destroyed. "It is

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<sup>591</sup> To use Nelson Mandela's phrase from his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, First paperback edition. ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013).

<sup>592</sup> See, for example, Desmond Tutu and John Allen, *The Rainbow People of God: The Making of a Peaceful Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1994). See also Nwamilorho Joseph Tshawane, "The Rainbow Nation: A Critical Analysis of the Notions of Community in the Thinking of Desmond Tutu" (UNISA, 2009).

<sup>593</sup> Wessel Bentley, "Defining Christianity's 'Prophetic Witness' in the Post-Apartheid South African Democracy," (Pretoria, South Africa: University of South Africa), 3.

understandable that because the church's prophetic identity had been shaped by its engaging with apartheid, the sudden absence of 'the beast of apartheid' created a void in the church's life."<sup>594</sup>

Already in the latter part of 1990, the same year that Nelson Mandela was released from prison, which highlighted that change was in the air, the largest ecumenical gathering took place in Rustenburg since Cottesloe. Although there were still significant disagreements, Rustenburg demonstrated the South African church's desire to become re-acquainted with one another after years of being separated and, in the case of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), isolated. The church began to break out of the doctrinal and social divide that apartheid created as it began to ponder what its role would be as the transition to a different South Africa was already on its way. Of significance in the formation of these new relationships was the DRC admitting its error in justifying apartheid theologically and its repentance of this.<sup>595</sup>

Thus, in the wake of South Africa's new political dispensation, the question arose as to what the church's role would now be? As noted in previous chapters, the understanding of the church's role in society was far from unified. As apartheid ended, however, and as the new democratic South Africa was born, there was an increased sense of freedom felt among all, which the churches also felt and experienced. The church has, since 1994, been grappling in trying to understand its new role now that apartheid had been defeated and the struggle had prevailed. Freedom and democracy have arrived. What are the implications for the church? This we will explore in the next section.

### *Are we free? What happened to the church in search of liberation? A quick glance into the "new" South Africa*

At the time of this writing, with a quick glance at the many media headlines, the different socio-economic studies that are emerging, the opinions of the many people with whom we work, not to mention the many different theological voices in

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<sup>594</sup> Bentley, "Defining Christianity's 'Prophetic Witness'," 3.

<sup>595</sup> See, for example, Prof. Willie Jonker's address at the Rustenburg Conference entitled "Understanding the Church situation and obstacles to Christian Witness in South Africa". See *The Road to Rustenburg: the Church looking forward to a new South Africa*, ed. by Louw Alberts and Frank Chikane (Cape Town, SA: Struik Christian Books Ltd., 1991), 87-98.

South Africa who are once again finding their voice, it becomes apparent that the long anticipated emancipation and liberation for which so many people struggled has not yet arrived.<sup>596</sup> There has been some change and not to acknowledge this would be remiss. John de Gruchy offers an important reminder: “Ignoring the many signs of hope is as bad as condoning blatant faults and failed promises.”<sup>597</sup> And yet obvious and apparent hurdles remain; others have emerged; some have increased. Inequality, ongoing violence, poverty, corruption, cronyism, lack of societal racial and economic transformation, and the seemingly lack of will for societal transformation are but a few of the most obvious hurdles that now exist in the new South Africa. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the democracy – that which was depicted as the symbol of the emancipation of all South Africans – has yet to meet the hopes people had.

Desmond Tutu, at a consultation held in October 2014 in Stellenbosch, South Africa, that “re-enacted” the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Faith Hearings, described, in a very poignant way, the current scene in South Africa. Tutu set the tone for the consultation by noting the stark and horrid realities that continue to plague South Africa. He described a picture of God crying because of the way in which God’s creation continues to treat one another – killing each other, taking advantage of one another, seeking ways to get more at the expense of another’s well-being, freedom, and dignity. This picture of God weeping highlights that this is not the reality that God wants.

The concern at this consultation was the realization of the virtual silence of the church in South Africa’s new political dispensation regarding the ongoing social issues whereby justice and equality remain wanting for the majority of South Africa’s people. Others have made similar observations. Simanga Raymond Kumalo suggests that what is now becoming more clear in the new political dispensation is that the church as a whole did not fight the oppressive system of apartheid but rather some outstanding individuals. “It is not surprising that, almost two decades after apartheid, the Christian Church in South Africa has been conspicuously silent as far as political

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<sup>596</sup> See, for example, Justice Malala, *We Have Now Begun Our Descent: How to Stop South Africa Losing Its Way* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2015), and R. W. Johnson, *How Long Will South Africa Survive? The Looming Crisis* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2015).

<sup>597</sup> John de Gruchy, “Kairos Meditations: Thirtieth Anniversary of the *Kairos Document*,” in *Kairos 30th Anniversary: Kairos as dangerous memory* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Kairos Southern Africa, 2015), 3.

issues and involvement are concerned. This is because the Christian churches can no longer form a voice of opposition in an oppressive society.”<sup>598</sup>

Albert Nolan says:

The dismantling of apartheid was nothing more than the first step in a very long process that will continue for many years to come – very many years.... The first step was a struggle against racial injustice and oppression. What we are up against now is economic injustice and oppression. The first step was a national struggle; what we face now is an international struggle against an economic system that is really and truly entrenched.... The struggle continues. In South Africa today the poor are becoming desperate and reckless.... Their anger seems to know no bounds.... We are shocked by their behavior and shocked we should be. We deplore the lack of leadership. And yet the struggle continues – without us. Where is the Church now? Where are the prophets? Where are the theologians? Where is our participation in the struggle?<sup>599</sup>

Bonganjalo Goba suggests that churches are in search of a new prophetic vision, at a time when South Africa is in a state of a moral crisis.<sup>600</sup> Wesley Mabuza argues “there has been a silence which shows that they [Christian activists] do not seem to have continued with the same critical stance that they had taken before the new dispensation.”<sup>601</sup> Gerald West, in responding to Francis Wilson and Mamphela Ramphele who suggested that the church in South Africa is better placed than any other organization to work with the poor, asks “[i]f this is so, then why has the church had so little success in making a *sustained* contribution to the reconstruction and development of (South) Africa?”<sup>602</sup> West also observes that “religion has receded to the private sphere in post-apartheid South Africa.”<sup>603</sup>

Anthony Balcomb, in pointing to several of the latest issues to hit the news in 2013,<sup>604</sup> notes that these examples

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<sup>598</sup> Raymond Simangaliso Kumalo, "Christianity and Political Engagement in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Political Theology* vol. 15, no. 3 (2014): 226.

<sup>599</sup> Albert Nolan, "A Luta Continua: The Struggle and Theology: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 143, no. July (2012): 116-17.

<sup>600</sup> Mongezi Guma, A. Leslie Milton, ed. *An African Challenge to the Church in the Twenty-First Century* (South African Council of Churches, 1997), 172.

<sup>601</sup> Wesley Madonda Mabuza, "Kairos Revisited: Investigating the Relevance of the Kairos Document for Church-State Relations within a Democratic South Africa" (University of Pretoria, 2009), 171.

<sup>602</sup> West, "Kairos 2000," 55.

<sup>603</sup> Gerald West, "Thabo Mbeki's Bible: The Role of Religion in the South African Public Realm after Liberation," in *Religion and Spirituality in South Africa: New Perspectives*, ed. Duncan Brown (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2009), 81.

<sup>604</sup> Balcomb here makes reference to the following specific issues: a case where strong evidence suggests that Baleka Mbete, the chairperson of the ruling party, received a bribe of 28 million rand to use her good offices to assist Gold Fields in securing a BEE empowerment deal; Dali Mpofu, a high profile advocate, demands 2.8 million rand or R17000 a day as payment for legal representation of the



...are indicative of chronic malaise in key sectors of our society – government, the economy, the police force, the judiciary, and the youth; they highlight the extent to which the Mandela legacy has been abandoned; they indicate a radical compromise of internationally recognized standards of good practice in key institutions in society; they indicate the extent to which fundamental and vital values that are the bulwark of any society – for example the dignity of work, have become associated with its opposite – that is the diminution of the self; they demonstrate the extent to which greed and the values of consumer capitalism have become embedded in society; they indicate the profligacy with which the responsibilities associated with high office can be flouted; they demonstrate that the government is not serious about its commitment to counteract corruption; they indicate the extent and depth to which the culture of entitlement has taken hold of the so-called “previously disadvantaged”; they indicate the massive schisms in society and the fragility of the social contract; they indicate that the race factor is still playing a hugely distortive role in society.<sup>605</sup>

Later in the same paper, Balcomb outlines his argument that “the liberation tradition as it has been understood and articulated in the South African context has failed to provide the ethical moorings through which a project of liberation, transformation and reconstruction can be pursued.”<sup>606</sup>

In short, there seems to be agreement that the church has, after the demise of apartheid, in fairly quick order, ceased to be “prophetic” and has largely become silent amid continuing racial tension, ongoing violent realities, ongoing oppression, increased economic inequality, and continuing lack of social justice and social transformation.<sup>607</sup> Thus the question arises: why, or perhaps how, did “Prophetic Theology”, after being such a force in the anti-apartheid struggle become so silent so quickly?

### *Further observations of the post-apartheid church: mapping the ecclesial ground in South Africa*

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Marikana miners; Judge president of the western cape, John Hlope, is currently undergoing a tribunal hearing because of an accusation by several constitutional court judges that he tried to influence the pending judgement against Jacob Zuma on charges of corruption. Courteny Griffiths QC, the high profile African English barrister who defended Charles Taylor, is his council; South Africa being such an adversarial society when it comes to the relations between business and labour and there is a huge and dangerous gulf between these two sectors of society; and although there is evidence that the head of the crime intelligence unit, Richard Mdluli, has committed murder and money laundering the head of police seems to be doing all she can to avoid having him brought to book.

<sup>605</sup> Anthony Balcomb, "Still Crying, the Beloved Country - the Crisis of Morality in South Africa and the (Improbable) Possibility of an Anabaptist Ethic," in *ANiSA Conference: Anabaptist Theologies in South Africa* (Volmoed, Western Cape: Anabaptist Network in South Africa, 2013), 1-2.

<sup>606</sup> Balcomb, "Still Crying, the Beloved Country," 6.

<sup>607</sup> The recent student protests taking place throughout the country serve as but one indicator to these ongoing realities.

Not surprisingly, given the differences and separation that were already in existence during apartheid, the South African church responded to the new political dispensation in different ways. Ultimately, as we will see throughout the rest of this chapter, one of the significant challenges that faced the South African church was how to understand the church's own ecclesial identity and purpose now that apartheid had been defeated and a new secular, liberal democracy emerged. What is the church's role in this new political dispensation?

Some churches, especially the Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Churches, had lost significant credibility due to their legacy of supporting and justifying apartheid. Thus, it has been difficult for these churches to know what their role might be in the "new South Africa". Other churches continued their more apolitical, privatized interpretation of salvation and gospel – i.e., what the KD described as "Church Theology". While other churches, such as those who had been part of the SACC, have tried to adapt and find ways of continuing to be socially engaged. Given the new context, these churches took a stance of being "in critical solidarity" with the new South African state. It behooves us to delve into these different responses in order to understand them.

### The Dutch Reformed Church

P.S. Theron shares some interesting perspectives in the Dutch Reformed Church's journey after apartheid. "Since the DRC provided the theological justification of apartheid for the discredited old South Africa," he notes, "the Afrikaners' formerly 'dearly beloved church,' probably more than any other institution, bears the brunt of this public disgrace."<sup>608</sup> Theron shows how the DRC provided the moral platform of the previous social order under apartheid. Thus, with the old social order torn down and a new democratically elected liberal and secular post-apartheid social order arising, the DRC has less social clout and political power

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<sup>608</sup> P. F. Theron, "From Moral Authority to Insignificant Minority: The Precarious State of the Dutch Reformed Church in a Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 2, no. 3 (2008): 228.

and influence than before; and it is struggling to know how to manage this new reality. He states:

The breakdown of apartheid as practical policy and the deconstruction of its justification as mere ideology caused the DRC to share the shame associated with this ill-fated experiment. Moreover, many of her faithful children have become disillusioned with their formerly 'dearly beloved church.' They blame her, sometimes vociferously, for the present dilemma of the Afrikaner. On an Afrikaans radio program during the General Synod (2004), people were invited to phone in and give their opinion of the DRC. The response of many can only be described as 'venomous.' Their disenchantment with their formerly spiritual mother often culminates in leaving her residence in search of a new spiritual dwelling.<sup>609</sup>

As hinted in the above excerpt, Theron notes how, during apartheid, the critical distance between the church as an institution and the Afrikaner people all but disappeared. The DRC, therefore, functioned as a bastion of Afrikaner civil religion.<sup>610</sup> The DRC's ecclesiology was based on a defensive posture – or *laager* – that felt vulnerable when criticism arose against the social order that it justified along with the Afrikaner role in it. Thus, "[d]ue to her track record, the DRC is at a disadvantage when it comes to social relevance in the new South Africa. The present powers that be are not likely to pay overly much attention to her."<sup>611</sup> This has led to a significant identity crisis post-1994 whereby the Reformed family has been, Theron argues, in desperate need to rethink its political theology.<sup>612</sup>

#### Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches

Interestingly, since the early 1990s, there has also been a significant rise among Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. As noted earlier, the KD described these churches as participating in "Church Theology". Such churches were less concerned about socio-political realities, preaching a more individualized, apolitical gospel of salvation.<sup>613</sup>

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<sup>609</sup> Theron, "From Moral Authority to Insignificant Minority," 231.

<sup>610</sup> Theron, "From Moral Authority to Insignificant Minority," 232.

<sup>611</sup> Theron, "From Moral Authority to Insignificant Minority," 235.

<sup>612</sup> Theron, "From Moral Authority to Insignificant Minority," 237.

<sup>613</sup> See, for example, Irvin G. Chetty, "Pentecostals and Socio-Political Engagement: An Overview from Azusa Street to the New Kairos Movement," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 143, no. July (2012). Chetty makes the claim that "[t]he history of Pentecostals reflects a conspicuous absence

Wessel Bentley suggests that the rise of Pentecostalism has also influenced mainline churches – churches that belonged, for example, to the SACC and who historically demonstrated more social concern – in having “congregations praying more about social problems than becoming actively involved in tackling social needs as a matter of faith.”<sup>614</sup> Likewise, Gerald West observes that “‘Church Theology’ is not a paradigm of the past; it remains the dominant theological trajectory of the present.”<sup>615</sup>

Allan Anderson, a noted scholar of Pentecostalism, demonstrates how there has not been much change in South African Pentecostalism from pre-1994 to post-1994. He shows how South African Pentecostal churches are still largely divided along ethnic and class lines, and are not very proactive regarding some of the social problems that exist such as AIDS, poverty, or crime.<sup>616</sup> He states: “A large section remains other-worldly and quietistic, content to retreat into ecstatic experiences while their familiar old world crumbles around them. Post-apartheid South Africa for them is another world that is not taken seriously.”<sup>617</sup>

And yet, there are also signs of a new Pentecostal/Charismatic expression emerging; one that does seek to engage and change society out of Christian convictions. These churches embrace two significant assumptions that are either expressed overtly or exist “behind the scenes” in how they engage society. The first is the assumption that if a church can become big enough then it will become influential and thus help to determine political and national policy. This is not unlike the assumptions often assumed regarding “civil society” – a mass mobilization can affect and influence those “in power”. The second, which is closely related, is the assumption that if leading politicians can be “saved” and become committed Christians, or better put, if committed Christians can become leaders in society, then they will be able to lead the country according to and towards a more Christian ethos. Both assumptions are often embraced *if* Pentecostal/Charismatic churches become socially engaged and respond to the new, post-apartheid, liberal or neo-liberal, democratic South Africa.

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of socio-political engagement” due particularly to its imminent eschatology and dualistic philosophy (Ibid., 23).

<sup>614</sup> Bentley, “Defining Christianity’s ‘Prophetic Witness’ ” 4.

<sup>615</sup> West, “Kairos 2000,” 56.

<sup>616</sup> I would also include violence in Anderson’s list.

<sup>617</sup> Allan Anderson, “New African Initiated Pentecostalism and Charismatics in South Africa,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35, no. 1 (2005): 87.

André P. Czeplédy argues that this “new breed” of Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches has taken a new approach to that of classical Pentecostalism. He notes how “Church leaders actively exhort members to bring about social and cultural change by promoting Christianity in both religious and secular arenas, partly by way of members becoming influential role models within wider society.”<sup>618</sup> Here it is worth quoting Czeplédy’s observations extensively regarding his analysis of one particular example: His People Christian Church (HP).

The wider implication is that religious belief is about changing society as much as about saving it, and that this is achieved by one becoming a leader in society—a part of the elite—in order to use one’s position for both individual inspiration and collective evangelism. Reference to an elite is not casual here... [as] there is an underlying expectation of achievement within the [His People] congregation that is both encouraging of secular success and self-defining of an upwardly mobile membership.... In this sense, the religiosity of HP not only constitutes a “symbolic reconstruction” (Comaroff 1985: 253) of the self through belief, but also a symbolic realignment of the self with the nation state and its demarcations of social status.... HP’s alignment—if not alliance—with the forces of capital and the state demonstrates a far more symbiotic relationship with power, one whereby modernity acts as an underlying platform for action and reflection rather than an antithesis to personal identity. In part, this is because His People embraces its social environment, a context where neo-liberalism itself is a primary project of the nation state in post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>619</sup>

Another example can be seen in the way churches, specifically Pentecostal or neo-Pentecostal mega-churches, have come to participate in the state-initiated National Religious Leaders Forum, which has since become the National Inter-Faith Council of South Africa (NICSA). In the NICSA Bentley suggests that the lines between the state and the church have become blurred “by becoming so close to government that it even gave political parties a platform at their church services to canvas for votes before elections.”<sup>620</sup> The guiding assumption is that the church must try to be in close proximity to the governing authorities – i.e., those “in power” – in order to try to influence them out of their Christian beliefs. Thus Kumalo argues “Pentecostal denominations which used to be apolitical during apartheid have taken center stage by engaging government in support of the policies of the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), particularly on domestic or individual moral

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<sup>618</sup> André P. Czeplédy, “A New Christianity for a New South Africa: Charismatic Christians and the Post-Apartheid Order,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 38, no. 3 (2008): 287.

<sup>619</sup> Czeplédy, “A New Christianity for a New South Africa,” 287-88.

<sup>620</sup> Bentley, “Defining Christianity’s ‘Prophetic Witness,’” 4.

issues such as abortion, capital punishment, and opposition to rights for gays and lesbians.”<sup>621</sup>

The concern, as Czeglédy aptly argues, continues to be how to influence society in general and the political forces in particular towards an assumed Christian social ethic. Furthermore, the assumed tactic is similar to that which “civil society” also embraces. In this way one could suggest that Bentley and West have created a separation that is too clean regarding the way in which Pentecostals and Charismatics desire to keep the gospel and politics separate.

Other churches, such as those affiliated with the SACC, which had a long history of socio-political engagement during apartheid, have also, in the post-apartheid era, tried to find ways in which to be socially engaged. Two particular trends have become fairly dominant. The one being a “theology of reconstruction” and/or “nation-building” paradigm which focuses on issues of building a new, inclusive nation. It embraces the opportunity to help the state in matters of effective and efficient governance. Such a paradigm has sought to offer constructive political engagement. The other paradigm is that of Public Theology, which is largely concerned with the way in which the Christian faith addresses issues in society and the public square. To this we now turn.

### *Transition from Prophetic to Reconstruction; from Confrontation to Reconciliation*

Already in 1992, Charles Villa-Vicencio began to lay the groundwork for what would become a shift towards a theology of reconstruction and nation building. This shift was significant, especially for those who were involved in liberation or prophetic theology during apartheid. The focus shifted from confrontation – confronting the system of apartheid – to a focus on reconstruction. Of significance in this shift was the way the church viewed and related to the new state.

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<sup>621</sup> Simanga R. Kumalo, “‘The People Shall Govern’: Now They Have Only the Possibility to Vote,” 252.

In 1994 a new government came into power led by Nelson Mandela. Miraculously, the focus of Mandela and the new state, rather than having the pendulum swing all the way to the other side, pursuing retribution against whites, Mandela delicately began to navigate a new course that would hopefully put an end to apartheid and the segregated imagination it created. The hope was that something different could emerge – a new form of state that would represent and serve everyone, black and white. This was not easy. There was a desire for retribution from some within the black community. And there was substantial fear within the white community.

Thus, it became important to confront the past in a way that would lead towards reconciliation and nation-building rather than vengeance and retribution. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission became one of the most notable exercises of this journey towards reconciliation.

Villa-Vicencio provides probably one of the most careful and nuanced arguments for a theology of reconstruction precisely when South Africans were beginning to look with anticipation into the future. In his book *A Theology of Reconstruction*, which was published in 1992, Villa-Vicencio begins by noting the change in context, as South Africa was in mid-swing away from apartheid towards a democratic republic. The church, therefore, faced different contextual necessities. Rather than simply being resistant, which he argues was the primary task of liberation theology,<sup>622</sup> the situation was now more complex which required the difficult task of saying “Yes” to the emergence of a democratic, just and kinder social order.<sup>623</sup> Thus, the task of a theology of reconstruction, he argues,

...has to do with bridging the gap between the ideals of a people who have in their long exile (without and within the country) dreamed utopian dreams of a new South Africa, and the realities of a land torn apart by generations of race, gender and class division. It will at the same time need to be developed within a context marked by an apartheid ravaged economy. Utopian visions created by prophets, preachers and poets are important ingredients in the process of reconstruction. Ultimately, however, these visions need to be translated into social practice and laws operative in the here and now.<sup>624</sup>

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<sup>622</sup> Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-Building and Human Rights* (Cape Town, South Africa: David Philip Publishers Ltd., 1992), 1.

<sup>623</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 7.

<sup>624</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 8.

The task set in front of the church, argues Villa-Vicencio, is to help shape society, which is, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer points out, the task of politics, before the dawning of the kingdom of God. The church, therefore, must promote the next steps required in order to attain and transition to a society that is socially just. This means, argues Villa-Vicencio, participating in the constitutional debates, the establishment of a rule of law, the affirmation of human rights, and the creation of laws that are designed to produce justice now.<sup>625</sup>

And yet, Villa-Vicencio is careful – much more so than later theologians, as we will see – to realize the danger in getting involved in state or nation-building. The church has previously fallen into the trap of developing forms of nationalism that forget what Karl Barth describes as the “revolution of God” to which everything must be continually subject including the most essential instruments of statecraft.<sup>626</sup> This means fighting against the temptation for the church to collapse either into Constantinian conformity or in becoming an agent for cataclysmic revolution.<sup>627</sup> Instead, a theology of reconstruction is to act essentially as a remedial and compensatory theology – a theology that seeks “to put right past wrongs and old abuses.”<sup>628</sup> Thus, to enact such a theology, those who have been wronged – the poor, oppressed, marginalized, and excluded sections of society – must be placed front and centre in every aspect of planning in the new era.<sup>629</sup> If this is met, he argues, a new form of liberatory theology could emerge for a new era.<sup>630</sup>

Villa-Vicencio recognizes the danger and temptation involved when politics and theology mix. “To leave politics to the politicians... is as inherently dangerous as it is to reduce theology to a specific political ideology that ultimately results in a marriage between church and state.”<sup>631</sup> The Constantinian temptation, he notes, has been a constant every time there is a major political or ecclesial revolution that seemingly provides an opportunity to start anew. And yet, “the church has never succeeded in exercising a positive, liberating and prophetic role within the structures

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<sup>625</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 13.

<sup>626</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 13.

<sup>627</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 13.

<sup>628</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 15.

<sup>629</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 16.

<sup>630</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 8.

<sup>631</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 20.



of power.”<sup>632</sup> It has, he continues, either been excluded from the political-decision making process or used as an instrument of ideological self-legitimation.<sup>633</sup> Put frankly, “theology has a bad track-record in the history of nation-building.”<sup>634</sup>

Theology has, overtly and by default, often through its long history legitimated the status quo in different parts of the world. At times it has fueled resistance and revolution, but rarely has it contributed seriously to the difficult programme of nation-building and political reconstruction. The question is whether the church is theologically capable of contributing to the establishment of good government (reducible in classical theology to promotion of the “common good”), or whether this responsibility is better left to secular forces.<sup>635</sup>

Thus, in wanting to follow Bonhoeffer’s vision whereby the church proclaims the presence of God in a secular or religionless way while also recognizing the many pit-falls into which the church has fallen when it has become involved within the structures of powers, Villa-Vicencio seeks to provide a theology that will ultimately help shape South Africa in being a more just and fair nation as it emerges from its painful and oppressive history. Indeed, we are left to assume that it would be irresponsible not to be involved in such a way.

Utopian dreams are important, but not enough to create something that is qualitatively different from the structures of oppression. Oppressive practices and ideologies dominant in one age have a way of stubbornly enduring periods of social reconstruction, economic upheavals and political revolution. For the dreams of the oppressed to become a reality they are to be translated into political programmes and law-making that benefit those who have longed for, and fought for, the new age, while protecting the new society against the abuses which marked past oppression. This ultimately is what a liberatory theology of reconstruction is all about.<sup>636</sup>

Villa-Vicencio argues that the role of the church during this time of transition, from apartheid to post-apartheid, must shift from its role of being primarily one of opposition – which he described as the primary purpose of Liberation Theology – to one of engagement and reconstruction. In this way he employs the metaphor of a post-exilic church. “The post-exilic metaphor is used as a tentative, open-ended symbol which draws on the liberative spirit of hope located alongside all else within the exilic

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<sup>632</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 20.

<sup>633</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 20.

<sup>634</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 21.

<sup>635</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 23.

<sup>636</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 29.

period and the return of the exiles.”<sup>637</sup> This metaphor builds on the complexities of how people could or should relate after a period of exile, both external and internal, as they explore what it means to become one nation.

This, he argues, requires the church to embrace a new role as a new nation – or a nation that seeks to be reconstructed – emerges. For the church this means living in the nexus of powerlessness and power.<sup>638</sup> The church’s primary responsibility is to work towards a vision whereby justice reigns. This is a vision of God’s Kingdom on earth. “If the church loses that vision, allowing that the prevailing order at any given time is essentially all that can be hoped for, it neglects an essential eschatological contribution to society.”<sup>639</sup> And yet, “responsible political theology,” as he puts it, must hold to both: a utopian vision on the one hand, and a realistic commitment to what is attainable in the here and now on the other.<sup>640</sup>

Villa-Vicencio tried to carefully navigate between the Constantinian temptation of a partnership between the church and state, which he already noted has led to the church’s capitulation towards a form of Constantinian conformity, and what he perceives as a new and urgent opportunity for the church to be involved in shaping a new society that enshrines the justice which the church sought into the very fabric of society. He says:

Rosemary Ruether’s critique is a telling one: “When faced with the test of a non-Roman identity, Augustine, as much as Eusebius, proved that his catholicity was a closed universe, bounded by the Greco-Roman oecumene.” It is this captivity, born in Eusebius’ celebration of Constantine as the “friend of God” and systematically, although with more nuances, incorporated into the identity of the church by Augustine and subsequent establishment theologians, that has been so explicitly exposed by the different types of liberation theology in the past few decades. The response of liberation theology to a church on the side of oppressive regimes has been part of the hope and the promise of people and a church in exile. It must now be translated into a theology of home-coming and nation-building.<sup>641</sup>

Here Villa-Vicencio is attempting to negotiate the fine line between a theology that challenges oppressive realities and their justification found in and through “establishment theologians” (i.e., State theologians?) and the shift that he argues is now needed in providing a theology of home-coming and nation-building. Put bluntly,

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<sup>637</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 27.

<sup>638</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 30.

<sup>639</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 30.

<sup>640</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 31.

<sup>641</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 32.

Villa-Vicencio recognized the dangers involved in providing a theology that can be (and historically has been) used to justify a particular form of nationalism. And yet, he feels obliged, given the immense significance of the South African situation in moving away from apartheid and its rooted ideology, to provide a theology that will help to build a new nation in the hope that justice for all can be instilled as its cornerstone. Failing to do so, we are led to conclude, results in the church's surrender of its moral right to provide any form of prophetic critique of the new society.<sup>642</sup>

Villa-Vicencio notes that in the pursuit of overcoming colonialism in other parts of Africa, the church has failed to challenge forces that do not surrender their ideological or political influence, thus resulting in forms of neo-colonialism which has wreaked havoc for many African nations in their quest to be independent. "African churches have never focused their fullest attention on nation-building in their own countries."<sup>643</sup> The result of which, he continues, is the church's failure to discover and embody what it means to be theo-politically responsible at a time of political transition.<sup>644</sup>

In explaining what it means to be "theo-politically responsible", Villa-Vicencio draws on Karl Barth's notion of the "permanent revolution" which provides a theological imperative for continual social renewal. He argues that if theology is to be taken seriously within the political arena, especially during a period of political reconstruction, "it has to contribute to the process of producing concrete proposals to deal with complex political and economic problems."<sup>645</sup> But, unlike Reinhold Niebuhr's "Christian realism", which in the "real world of politics"<sup>646</sup> recognized the need for certain political compromises, Villa-Vicencio argues that something totally different is required in the "Third World" whereby the hope is not to preserve or reform the existing order but radically transform it.<sup>647</sup> "In these situations the need is for a theology that preserves neither the global status quo nor the neo-colonial structures left over from colonial days. The need is for a theology which promotes such material and ideological resources as are necessary to facilitate the transfer of

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<sup>642</sup> We are led to this conclusion by Villa-Vicencio's use of the Cuban church as an example whereby it failed to challenge to the old Batista dictatorship and the demands of the majority of the Cuban people from which the new regime emerged. Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 33.

<sup>643</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 37.

<sup>644</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 38.

<sup>645</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 38.

<sup>646</sup> To use Villa-Vicencio's own words. Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 38.

<sup>647</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 38-39.

resources and power from the *few* (the rich and the powerful) to the *many* (the poor and the powerless).”<sup>648</sup> And yet, although Villa-Vicencio rejects Niebuhr’s particular form of realism he does not reject the need to be realistic as such given the particular context, and thus its particular demands, of (South) Africa.

As the contextual realities shift, Villa-Vicencio argued that a nation-building theology must also be contextually aware. In being contextually aware, such a theology must avoid two poles: 1) a theology that absolutizes relative political systems and ideologies, which suggests that God can be defined by a particular political option; and 2) the use of divine absolutes which reduces all political systems and ideologies to the same level of inadequacy and sinfulness, which thus allows the Christian to remain “outside” of or indifferent to specific political choices.<sup>649</sup> Here, although he does not use the terms, we can see how Villa-Vicencio summarizes the temptation of “State Theology” and “Church Theology”. Thus, Villa-Vicencio sought to provide a challenge to the church to embody a “Prophetic Theology”, albeit a different form of “Prophetic Theology” that meets the contextual needs of a new era – an era of reconstruction instead of confrontation.

Villa-Vicencio then provided particular characteristics for a theology of nation-building. First, it must have a clear understanding and analysis regarding its contextual reality and time. A theology of reconstruction, he suggested, is pre-eminently a contextual theology while at the same time a retroactive theology as it seeks to correct the causes of suffering and conflict in society.<sup>650</sup> The church’s responsibility, therefore, is to both be critical and honest about the past and the pain caused from it while making positive proposals concerning reconstruction at the constitutional and law-making level.<sup>651</sup>

Second, the church has a responsibility to help create a democratic culture whereby dissent and disagreement are valued as people learn to live in mutual respect.<sup>652</sup> “Theologically, it is a community within which people are taught to love one another, to forgive one another and to bear one another’s burdens.”<sup>653</sup> To fail in

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<sup>648</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 39.

<sup>649</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 39.

<sup>650</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 41.

<sup>651</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 42.

<sup>652</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 42.

<sup>653</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 42.

creating this kind of culture, argued Villa-Vicencio, is for the church to fail its liberating obligation to society.<sup>654</sup>

And third, Villa-Vicencio argued that the church has a responsibility to provide a theology that supports and promotes democracy at every level of society.<sup>655</sup> This counters, as he put it, the historic “Constantinian alliance” between the church and the state where a hierarchy of control has emerged in the church similar to that which exists within the state.<sup>656</sup> “Indeed, in many situations the church is today more authoritarian, more hierarchical, more oppressive and less democratic, less participatory and less liberating than the state.”<sup>657</sup> This does, however, raise the question for Villa-Vicencio as to whether “the new wine of God’s liberatory presence” that was sweeping across South Africa (Villa-Vicencio says “globe”!) can be contained within the old ecclesial institutional church structures that had been designed for a colonial age?<sup>658</sup> This proves to be a good question as South Africa’s journey enters into a post-apartheid, democratic era.

Villa-Vicencio astutely noted that the South African church is in a similar position to that of the early church at the moment of the Constantinian alliance. Historically, he suggested, the church capitulated to Constantine’s invitation to participate within the power structure of the Roman Empire. Thus the question is whether the church will capitulate if it becomes involved in a theology of nation-building. Villa-Vicencio, argued that, rather than following the example of the early church when it capitulated to the state under Constantine, the church ought to participate in offering a constructive role in the new liberal context towards which South Africa was shifting. The political context, in other words, provides an opportunity for the church to instill certain virtues (e.g., a fundamental concern for human rights) into South Africa’s new political dispensation. Indeed, one senses that Villa-Vicencio would deem it irresponsible if the church did not act on this opportunity; thus his comment that “the Constantinian proposal be reconsidered.”<sup>659</sup>

Villa-Vicencio was one of the most significant voices for the church to embrace a shift from what he deemed to be prophetic, which he defined as

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<sup>654</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 45.

<sup>655</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 46.

<sup>656</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 47.

<sup>657</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 47.

<sup>658</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 47.

<sup>659</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 48.

confrontational, to reconstructive. Wiseman Nkuhlu, in accepting such a vision, noted during SACC's 1995 national conference on "Being church in a New Land":

[The church had to] be the example of peace, racial tolerance, democracy and caring;  
be the instrument of understanding, healing and reconciliation;  
be part of the delivery of social services;  
initiate projects for social and economic development;  
resolve disputes between communities and government;  
fight against crime and corruption;  
assist with the internalizing of the values of society's new-found freedom.<sup>660</sup>

These words regarding the church's call to assist with the nation-building process surprisingly came from outside of the church – from the newly elected government along with the business sector. Likewise, Wessel Bentley demonstrates how Tokyo Sexwale, who was still a senior leader in the African National Congress (ANC) during this 1995 SACC conference, "pleaded for the church to remain vigilant in striving for human dignity, holding the new government accountable for the promises it made to deliver basic services, to be speedy in contributing to social redress and to promote the equality of all people."<sup>661</sup> He begged: "Please – you must squat in our offices if we are not providing shelter to people... The church must keep as close to us as saliva on the tongue. If you forsake us, if you abandon us – we will sin; we are just human."<sup>662</sup>

*The shift in the SACC: Embracing the Reconstruction motif—the move from a Mosaic discourse to a Davidic discourse*

One example of the way such reconstruction discourse was adopted can be seen in the South African Council of Churches (SACC). The SACC increasingly became more vocal against the apartheid government and its system of rule. Indeed, the SACC came to be described as the "churches in opposition" during apartheid. But, after 1994, it embraced a different stance and approach, especially in relation to South Africa's new government. It is fair to say that Villa-Vicencio's suggested change in

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<sup>660</sup> Wiseman L. Nkuhlu, "The Church and Socio-Economic Reconstruction During the Transition" (paper presented at the Being church in a New Land: SACC National Conference, 1995, Johannesburg, 1995), 7-8.

<sup>661</sup> Bentley, "Defining Christianity's 'Prophetic Witness'," 4.

<sup>662</sup> Bentley, "Defining Christianity's 'Prophetic Witness'," 4.

perspective and approach became embodied in the way the SACC related to the new government post-1994.

In 2010, Anders Bengt Olof Göranzon submitted a PhD thesis entitled “The Prophetic voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990 – Searching for a renewed Kairos”<sup>663</sup> that is particularly helpful in exploring SACC’s shift in role, approach, and voice as South Africa entered its post-apartheid era. Göranzon’s thesis explores the way in which the SACC’s prophetic voice changed throughout South Africa’s process of becoming a democratic state.<sup>664</sup> He focuses particularly on the SACC’s voice towards the state.<sup>665</sup>

In his study, Göranzon highlights the challenge that inevitably faced the SACC upon the transition from apartheid to a democratic order; the “common enemy” which so effectively united those who opposed the apartheid state was now gone. John de Gruchy and Steve de Gruchy, for example, note the irony in that “an ideology of apartness and exclusion provided the churches in South Africa with a sense of unity and cohesion.”<sup>666</sup> Thus, as unity was found in the struggle, the challenge after apartheid was for the church to find a common witness.<sup>667</sup> Indeed, although there was a recognition of the vast amount of work required to reconstruct South African society that would overcome the vestiges of apartheid, there were so many things to focus on (e.g., violence, poverty, inequality, corruption, disease, education, crime, and so forth) that a unified response to all these social ills proved difficult. What’s more, whereas international funding for the struggle against the apartheid regime was easily attained, John and Steve de Gruchy highlight how, after the demise of apartheid along with the emergence of a neo-liberal economic vision backed by many investors or potential investors (e.g., the USA and its partners in the G8, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and the International Monetary Fund), the focus in how to tackle the social issues that remained was largely influenced by the funders themselves.<sup>668</sup>

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<sup>663</sup> Anders Bengt Olof Göranzon, “The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990 - Searching for a Renewed Kairos” (University of the Free State, 2010).

<sup>664</sup> Göranzon, “The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990,” 1.

<sup>665</sup> Göranzon, “The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990,” 2.

<sup>666</sup> de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 223.

<sup>667</sup> Göranzon, “The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990,” 12.

<sup>668</sup> John and Steve de Gruchy note, for example, that this meant “that many of the socialist and populist presuppositions of the struggle to end apartheid would be considered ‘outdated in the face of reality’, and that the global trade regime would have an impact on the socio-economic fabric of a country that through sanctions, divestment and closed markets had developed thorough-going import-substitution practices” (de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 224).

Göranzon echoes this observation in his analysis of the SACC after apartheid. He demonstrates how their “partners” dictated how the SACC should express its voice.<sup>669</sup>

Through his analysis of the SACC, Göranzon makes several interesting observations in how it views and engages the new, post-apartheid state. Before 1994, the SACC, which was often described as “the churches in opposition” (i.e., in opposition to the state), obviously embraced a more confrontational mode of engagement with the (apartheid) state. SACC’s form of discourse before 1994 – before 1990 especially – was deeply influenced by Liberation Theology and focused more on notions such as “liberation”, “liberation from oppression”, “God as liberator”, “God as being on the side of the poor and oppressed”, and so forth.<sup>670</sup> This, argues Göranzon, portrays examples of what he describes as a “Mosaic prophetic” discourse with its focus arising out the exodus narrative – the desire to be freed from slavery.<sup>671</sup>

“Mosaic” discourse, he argues, sees the government primarily as illegitimate. As such, there is a willingness to go against the prescribed law, which is viewed as unjust, in order to stand with the oppressed<sup>672</sup> in the pursuit of liberation.<sup>673</sup> “In this ‘*Mosaic prophetic*’ discourse,” notes Göranzon, “there is no other option than the replacement of the unjust and illegitimate regime.”<sup>674</sup>

And yet, Göranzon observes that such a lens paints a post-liberation – and therefore post-apartheid – situation as a kind of Promised Land.<sup>675</sup>

This is a new note in the way that the SACC talks about the government. If we read the text from a Mosaic point of view, one could say that the ‘*Mosaic prophetic*’ discourse is ending and being replaced by a discourse of entering the Blessed Canaan. This means that there is no further need for liberation. The people have come to the land flowing with milk and honey.<sup>676</sup>

Thus, although there are vestiges of a “Mosaic” discourse, which gradually recede in the post-apartheid era, Göranzon notes a shift in discourse style after 1994.

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<sup>669</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 338.

<sup>670</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 309.

<sup>671</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 309.

<sup>672</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 311.

<sup>673</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 310.

<sup>674</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 313.

<sup>675</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 313.

<sup>676</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 313.



One particular example in how the SACC would relate to the new democratically elected government was that of being in “critical solidarity”.<sup>677</sup> Indeed, this became the SACC’s preferred method to describe its relationship with the new government. The classical notion of “solidarity” refers to some kind of relationship between persons or groups that have common responsibilities and interests.<sup>678</sup> Thus, as Göranzon demonstrates through the SACC General Secretary’s Address in 1995:

The Churches are committed to stand in critical solidarity with the Government, participating in and supporting those aspects that uphold justice, that bring new dignity and create greater opportunities for the people, but challenging the Government when it forgets the marginalized, the needs of the poor, and its responsibility to all sectors of society. The Church’s role in civil society is well established, it has a strong base from which to call [for] accountability.<sup>679</sup>

And yet there is an assumption that the SACC and the new government participate in the classical understanding of being in “solidarity”. In the SACC’s General Secretary’s 1995 report, for example, the observation is made that “The President has graciously agreed to represent us at several important State functions. The Church must not now give up its influence and presence and give critical support to the proper administration of the affairs of the State.”<sup>680</sup> A symbiotic relation, in other words, is assumed between the church, as represented by the SACC, and the new government. Göranzon observes that it is not clear as to whether being in “critical solidarity” also means or allows for the possibility of being “prophetic”.

Indeed, with the benefit of hindsight, it has become clear that being “critical” towards those who were “comrades” – those with whom they were engaged in the struggle against the apartheid regime – is a difficult task. Simanga Raymond Kumalo describes how many government leaders had been involved with church or church based organizations. As such, there is a close personal friendship between government leaders and church leaders. “These people marched together, slept in prisons together, and were tortured together and even protected one another in the face of the brutality of the security forces. Thus those who remained in the church find it difficult to stand up and criticize their comrades who are now in government.”<sup>681</sup> Kumalo further

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<sup>677</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 294.

<sup>678</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 294.

<sup>679</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 295.

<sup>680</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 295.

<sup>681</sup> Kumalo, "'The People Shall Govern': Now They Have Only the Possibility to Vote," 11.

suggests three reasons for the decrease in the SACC's "prophetic voice" post-1994. The first being that churches no longer saw the pressing need for political engagement and so retired to their denominational enclaves. Second, prominent church leaders moved into the government. And third, international financial support decreased significantly.<sup>682</sup> Göranzon therefore concludes that "almost every form of criticism has disappeared [from the SACC], and only solidarity or support remains."<sup>683</sup>

Göranzon suggests that a "Mosaic" discourse shifted towards what he describes a "Davidic" discourse. He defines "Davidic" discourse as that which, first of all, recognizes the government as legitimate, and second as a potential partner.<sup>684</sup> This highlights the shift from a form of discourse inspired by Black/Liberation Theology to one inspired by a theology of reconstruction.<sup>685</sup>

From 1994 onwards it is obvious that the SACC accepts and welcomes the new dispensation. In that sense the discourse is Davidic, being an example, if not of Royal consolidation, then at least of State consolidation. The Churches are not seen as an outsider preaching the need for liberation. Like the Davidic prophets, the Church is part of the ruling power.<sup>686</sup>

Göranzon also highlights how "[i]n 1994 there is a dramatic change, as the SACC begins to cooperate closely with the government."<sup>687</sup> There is, as he demonstrates, a thin line, if any line at all, between a "Davidic" discourse and "State Theology."<sup>688</sup>

The most obvious example of this shift from a "Mosaic prophetic" discourse to a "Davidic prophetic" discourse is the way in which numerous church leaders, active in and leaders of the SACC, became part of the new government after 1994. Frank Chikane, Allan Boesak, Itumeleng Mosala, and Smangiliso Mkatshwa are but a few prominent examples.

The way in which the SACC now came to relate with the state is an example of how a theology of reconstruction or nation-building came to be embodied. Indeed,

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<sup>682</sup> Kumalo, "Christianity and Political Engagement in Post-Apartheid South Africa," 227.

<sup>683</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 296. It should be noted how, in 2001, the approach towards government once again shifted from being "in critical solidarity" to being "in critical engagement".

<sup>684</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 285-88.

<sup>685</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 314.

<sup>686</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 290.

<sup>687</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 289.

<sup>688</sup> Göranzon, "The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990," 289.

this was a new way for the SACC to relate to the state. But it is not, as we shall see in the next chapter, new in the way the church has related to the state historically.

### *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission*

One of the first grand scale nation-building and reconstruction projects that emerged in the new South Africa was that of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In order to wrestle with the painful history of violence, atrocities, and injustice under apartheid's rule, the new South African state – the government of National Unity – established the TRC in 1995. This was the first process of its kind. The TRC was designed as a mechanism that would work towards national restoration, reconstruction, and healing. Desmond Tutu was appointed as the chair of the TRC. Tutu articulated well the intent of the TRC: "We were a wounded people, all of us, because of the conflict of the past. No matter on which side we stood, we all were in need of healing."<sup>689</sup>

The intent of the TRC was to confront the gross violations of human rights in order to obtain a clear and truthful understanding of the violence and dehumanization that were consequences of apartheid's rule so that forgiveness and reconciliation could potentially be possible for the nation as a whole. As Tutu said: "in order to forgive, one needs to know whom one is forgiving, and why."<sup>690</sup> Thus, if our desire is to pursue forgiveness, which is a cornerstone for reconciliation, then the truth of the matter must also be known. "Finding truth goes far beyond establishing historical and legal facts. It has to do with understanding, accepting accountability, justice, restoring and maintaining the fragile relationship between human beings..."<sup>691</sup>

The TRC proved to be an innovative and creative way of wrestling with South Africa's painful history. Indeed, it has become an example for many other countries that have experienced similar violence. For South Africa, the process was a meaningful and eye opening experience. Those who the apartheid regime oppressed,

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<sup>689</sup> "Tutu: 'Unfinished business' of the TRC's healing" in an article in *The Mail & Guardian*, 25 April, 2014: <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-04-24-unfinished-business-of-the-trc-healing>. Accessed February 21, 2015.

<sup>690</sup> "Tutu: 'Unfinished Business' of the Trc's Healing," *The Mail & Guardian*, 25 April, 2014.

<sup>691</sup> Piet Meiring, "Bonhoeffer and Costly Reconciliation in South Africa," in *Bonhoeffer Consultation* (Stellenbosch, South Africa: Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch, 2015), 7.

repressed, and dehumanized were able to share their experiences, their stories, and ultimately their pain and suffering. They were able to regain a sense of dignity and humanity. For once they actually mattered and were heard. Whites, on the other hand, could no longer hide behind the pretense of ignorance as to the horrid cost paid for their privilege and comfort.

The TRC served several significant purposes. It provided a venue for the truth to be told about apartheid, the atrocities that it perpetrated and justified, as well as the society it engineered.<sup>692</sup> The TRC provided an avenue through which victims could find their collective humanity. It also served as a form of release about what happened to them. One victim, for example, recalls: "When I was tortured at John Vorster Square my tormentor sneered at me: 'You can shout your lungs out. Nobody will ever hear you!' Now, after all these years, people are hearing me!"<sup>693</sup> Another example, after a particularly difficult testimony in East London, a Xhosa mother shared the terrible events and tortures inflicted on her fourteen year old son finally remarked about the relief she felt in sharing her experience and her truth: "Oh yes, Sir, it was worth the trouble [to testify]. I think that I will immediately fall asleep tonight – for the first time in sixteen years. Perhaps tonight I will be able to sleep without nightmares."<sup>694</sup>

The TRC also lifted the shroud of secrecy that clouded much of South Africa's history. This was a liberating practice; many secrets were revealed and no longer had to be maintained. Piet Meiring provides an example:

On the final day of his appearance before the TRC when he had to testify to his role in the Khotso House (headquarters of the South African Council of Churches) bombing, former Minister of Police Adrian Vlok, said: 'When the final question was asked and when the legal team of the South African Council of Churches indicated its satisfaction... my heart sang. I got a lump in my throat and I thanked God for his grace and mercy to me.'<sup>695</sup>

As South Africa transitioned from apartheid to democracy, the TRC played a particularly crucial role as a pressure cooker valve. The apartheid system had generated a lot of pent up tension and the TRC can be credited in helping to prevent a

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<sup>692</sup> How much of the truth is a different and contested question.

<sup>693</sup> Meiring, "Bonhoeffer and Costly Reconciliation in South Africa," 7.

<sup>694</sup> Quoted in Piet Meiring, *Chronicle of the Truth Commission* (Vanderbijlpark: Carpe Diem, 1999), 371.

<sup>695</sup> Meiring, "Bonhoeffer and Costly Reconciliation in South Africa," 7. See also Meiring, *Chronicle of the Truth Commission*, 357.

full scale “explosion”. South Africa is often touted as an example of a relatively peaceful transition of power and the TRC was one of the mechanisms that allowed for the relatively peaceful birth of a new nation – a new South Africa. This is surely worthy of praise.

Despite the positive role the TRC played in helping the transition towards a democratic South Africa and in coping and dealing with the legacy of apartheid, making it a wonderful example and testimony of reconstruction from which other countries now draw, there were also some shortcomings of this process. Indeed, today, nineteen years after the TRC’s conclusion in 1998, obstacles in South Africa’s journey towards reconciliation are becoming increasingly apparent. Pressure is increasing once again. The violent and repressive imagination that apartheid helped to create still dominates. Recent violence directed at African foreign nationals – labeled xenophobia – as well as the police’s ongoing use of excessive force, which in 2012, for example, resulted in the killing of 34 striking miners at Marikana, are but two examples of this.

There are different reasons for this. The first is the lack of definition regarding the notion of “reconciliation”. What does it mean and what does it look like practically?

Earlier, especially in chapter two which looked at “Church Theology”, it was noted how terms such as “reconciliation” and “peace” were often used to encourage civility between races without substantially shifting the apartheid-created social order. This had the effect of pacifying those who challenged the status quo while justifying, ironically, the violence required to maintain “the peace”. Such notions were pressed into service in maintaining the logical inevitability of separation, inequality, and injustice.

But for others, reconciliation meant the necessity of radically altering the apartheid-created social order so that justice and equality could exist for all. This was understood as true reconciliation and is, frankly, more in-line with the biblical notion of reconciliation which shares close ties with justice, which is deeply unsettling. It tirelessly pursues right relationships with God, with one another, and with creation. It challenges and alters our ways of being in the world and the ways in which we live in order to make right relationships possible and a priority. In the South African context,

those who sought this form of reconciliation were often depicted as “disturbers of the peace.”<sup>696</sup>

After the demise of apartheid, even those who were battle-hardened in the struggle and skeptical of notions such as “reconciliation”, were willing to begin talking about it. The anti-reconciliatory system had now been eliminated, at least in theory, thus making room for the possibility for true reconciliation. The desire for this true reconciliation was demonstrated by the positive traction of the TRC process.

Unfortunately, the many different understandings of “reconciliation” became a stumbling block for the TRC and beyond. First there was the question as to whether justice would be integral in the pursuit of reconciliation. There were, for example, significant questions as to whether the TRC would seek retributive justice or restorative justice. The former, Tutu contended, was more characteristic of African jurisprudence.<sup>697</sup> The latter, which is ultimately the direction Tutu encouraged, was “not retribution or punishment, but in the spirit of *ubuntu*, the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships. This kind of justice seeks to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he or she has injured by his or her offence.”<sup>698</sup>

Megan Shore notes how the transition from apartheid to democracy was based on the hope for a restoration of a moral human community.<sup>699</sup> “If truth-telling was supposed to act as a means of including all South Africans in a shared narrative, then reconciliation should be understood more properly as a moral process that restores relationships and fosters the moral community that was broken with apartheid.”<sup>700</sup> The problem, Shore points out, is that reconciliation in the TRC process was not clearly defined.

Antjie Krog suggests another reason – that what happened during the TRC process was a clash of cultural understanding regarding concepts such as “reconciliation”, “forgiveness”, “justice”, and so forth. In response to criticisms of the

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<sup>696</sup> A recent biography of Desmond Tutu, for example, has been published describing him as “A Rabble-Rouser for Peace.” See John Allen, *Rabble-Rouser for Peace: The Authorized Biography of Desmond Tutu* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

<sup>697</sup> Meiring, “Bonhoeffer and Costly Reconciliation in South Africa,” 9.

<sup>698</sup> Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999), 51-52.

<sup>699</sup> Megan Shore, *Religion and Conflict Resolution: Christianity and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Farnham, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub. Ltd., 2009), 109.

<sup>700</sup> Shore, *Religion and Conflict Resolution*, 109.

TRC, Krog, in wrestling with the question as to why there was such a lack of revenge killings as compared to other contexts such as post-WWII Europe, argues that the TRC process and the objectives that arose from it centred on a different epistemological and ontological background and therefore perspective. The South African TRC, notes Krog, was different than other such truth commissions. It was the first commission to *individualize* amnesty; it had public testimonies; and it allowed victims from both sides of the conflict to testify at the same forum.<sup>701</sup> But one of the most significant different, she suggests, was the TRC's focus on "interconnectedness" (i.e. *ubuntu*) and the manner in which a person builds him or herself into part of a community and vice versa.<sup>702</sup> This became embedded in the process.

...interconnectedness-towards-wholeness forms the interpretive foundation of it (as well as of the theology of Desmond Tutu or the politics of Nelson Mandela). I want to suggest that it was this foundation that enabled people to reinterpret Western concepts such as forgiveness, reconciliation, amnesty, justice, and so on in a new and usable way; in other words, that these concepts had moved across cultural borders and been infused with the energized by a sense of interconnectedness-towards-wholeness.<sup>703</sup>

Krog suggests that within the concept of interconnectedness-towards-wholeness,<sup>704</sup> notions such as forgiveness and reconciliation can not be separated:<sup>705</sup> "... the one begins, or opens up, a process of becoming, while the other is the crucial step in this becoming."<sup>706</sup> Indeed, these notions are versions of the same root word in isiXhosa.<sup>707</sup> "... [A]nd here lies the 'newness': in the philosophy of Ubuntu, the two concepts are indivisibly intertwined, philosophically and linguistically. This means a

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<sup>701</sup> Antjie Krog, "Research into Reconciliation and Forgiveness at the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Homi Bhabha's Architecture of the New," *Canadian Journal of Law & Society* 30, no. 2 (2015): 211.

<sup>702</sup> Krog, "Research into Reconciliation and Forgiveness at the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Homi Bhabha's Architecture of the New," 211.

<sup>703</sup> Krog, "Research into Reconciliation and Forgiveness at the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Homi Bhabha's Architecture of the New," 211.

<sup>704</sup> This is Krog's English short-hand for the concept of *ubuntu*.

<sup>705</sup> Krog, "Research into Reconciliation and Forgiveness at the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Homi Bhabha's Architecture of the New," 212.

<sup>706</sup> Krog, "Research into Reconciliation and Forgiveness at the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Homi Bhabha's Architecture of the New," 212.

<sup>707</sup> Krog explains: "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in isiXhosa is *Ikomishoni yeNyani noXolelwaniso*. *Noxelelwaniso* is the isiXhosa for 'and reconciliation.' The *no-* consists of the connective *na-* (and, plus the prefix *u-* of *uxolelwaniso* [reconciliation]). *Uxolelwaniso* and the noun *uxolo* (peace) comes from the verb *ukuxola* (to become satisfied), which are being used most often as *ukuxolela* (to forgive). The verb *ukuxolelwanisa* (to see to it that forgiveness happens) is in its turn the origin for the noun *uxolelwaniso* (reconciliation). Thus the word for reconciliation and forgiveness are versions of the *same* root in isiXhosa..." (Ibid., 212).

radical departure from the general assumption that reconciliation and forgiveness are two separate and divisible processes.”<sup>708</sup>

These different worldviews, however, led to some confusion about whether reconciliation was the projected outcome of the TRC process or whether the TRC was but the initial stage of a much longer process towards reconciliation.<sup>709</sup> Although the TRC lifted some of the oppressive clouds that were part of the apartheid legacy, it became apparent that some had the perception that South Africa would be reconciled upon the completion of the TRC process and that life could simply move on without drudging through the past. Some assumed that people, after the TRC process, would – almost magically – be able to get along with each other. It would be possible, they thought, that South Africans could now forget about apartheid and move on.

In 2005, for example, an Afrikaans rock/punk song hit the radio waves in South Africa which contained the following lyrics:

The fact that I do not always agree  
Does not make me a racist.  
So look for the beam in your own eye.  
Because: I won't say sorry anymore.  
I won't say sorry anymore  
I will stand in the back of the line  
Carry our rainbow on my sleeves  
But I will not say sorry anymore  
Stop wasting money on name changes  
There are people without houses, children without food  
Who is the guilty one?<sup>710</sup>

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<sup>708</sup> Krog, "Research into Reconciliation and Forgiveness at the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Homi Bhabha's Architecture of the New," 212. Here Krog makes a very interesting and important observation. She notes that, because of the interdependency between the concepts of reconciliation and forgiveness, black South Africans, due to the lack of change and *wiedergutmachen* (literally, "to make good again" or "to restore"), victims are now becoming increasingly angry (Ibid., 217). "Thus, and perhaps most importantly, only by identifying interconnectedness-towards- wholeness as the foundation of the TRC process is one be able to understand that TRC resentment has more to do with thwarted beliefs now, because things were not made 'good' than with the abuse of Christianity to suppress anger" (Ibid., 217).

<sup>709</sup> This paragraph was largely taken from a review that I wrote on Shore's book. See Andrew Suderman, "Megan Shore, Religion and Conflict Resolution: Christianity and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission -- Book Review," *Political Theology* 13, no. 2 (2012): 260.

<sup>710</sup> Klopjag, Nie Langer. From Album 3, as translated in Jansen, J.D. 2009. *Knowledge in the blood. Confronting race and the apartheid past*, 40.



Beyond the lyrics lies the emotion involved when this song was (is) sung. This is particularly true for the lines “I will not say sorry anymore” and how, in the related music video, it is repeated and repeated. The assumption of this song is that recognition for wrongdoing has been made; apologies have been given; now it’s time to move on. Little, if any, emphasis is placed on exploring ways in which restoration and restitution can be made so that the people of South Africa as a whole can live rightly with one another.

Cobus van Wyngaard, a young Afrikaans Dutch Reformed theologian, in reflecting on this song, notes that, although “white identity” as such is not mentioned in the song, it does demonstrate how people in the mainline Afrikaans churches are at best unable to reimagine their identity apart from their “whiteness”; and at worst contributes to the continued indebtedness to this racialised identity.<sup>711</sup> This mentality fails to understand or deal with the implications of apartheid at not only the emotional level, but also at the social, political, and economic level and the racial constructs that have been so closely tied to these realities in the South African context. It continues to perpetuate a superficial understanding of “reconciliation”.

The problem, of course, is that the reality of most South Africans has not been foundationally altered since the TRC. Privilege and inequality continue to dominate. In fact, the gap between rich and poor has become worse. Tutu and many others officially involved in the TRC process tried to inform the nation that the TRC should be seen as the beginning of a much longer walk towards (true) reconciliation. However, the intentionality required for true reconciliation has largely been put on the back burner if it indeed remains on the stove at all. Tutu notes that there is a lot of “unfinished business” in re-weaving the fabric of South Africa’s society:

By “unfinished business” I [Tutu] refer specifically to the fact that the level of reparation recommended by the commission was not enacted; the proposal of a once-off wealth tax as a mechanism to effect the transfer of resources was ignored, and those who were declined amnesty were not prosecuted....  
... [H]ealing is a process. How we deal with the truth after its telling defines the success of the process. And this is where we have fallen tragically short. By choosing not to follow through on the commission’s recommendations, government not only compromised the commission’s contribution to the process, but the very process itself.<sup>712</sup>

<sup>711</sup> Cobus van Wyngaard, “Post-Apartheid Whiteness and the Challenge of Youth Ministry in the Dutch Reformed Church” in *Journal of Youth & Theology*, vol. 10, no. 1/2 – 2011, pp. 26-27.

<sup>712</sup> Desmond Tutu, “Tutu: ‘Unfinished business’ of the TRC’s healing” in *Mail & Guardian* website, 25 April 2014. <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-04-24-unfinished-business-of-the-trc-healing>. Accessed February 21, 2015. The Khulumani Support Group, an organization established to support the victims

The work needed for true reconciliation has not been done. Confused understandings of reconciliation have made it difficult to pursue.

A second aspect that has been confusing since the end of the TRC process is the question as to who carries the responsibility to bring about true reconciliation. On October 28, 1998, Desmond Tutu presented the TRC's final 5-volume report to South Africa's first elected president, Nelson Mandela. What has been perhaps unexpected in Tutu's handing over the report were the people's and the church's assumptions and expectations that were passed along with it – that the “ministry of reconciliation” (II Cor. 5:18) became the responsibility of the state. Indeed, it can be argued that this has been the fundamental characteristic and assumption within a theology of reconstruction and nation-building – that reconstruction and nation-building is primarily the responsibility of the state. The church can, and, as we have seen, some argue ought to, “partner” with the state in the work towards such reconstruction and nation-building. The primary responsibility, however, assumes to lie with the state.

In October, 2014, a re-enactment of the TRC Faith Communities Hearing invited churches to share their journey and work towards reconciliation since the original Faith Communities Hearing in 1997. In the original hearing almost all of South Africa's faith communities committed themselves to dismantle apartheid's legacy and to pursue reconciliation, both in society and in their own denominations. But during the re-enactment they admitted that they had “dropped the ball” in this effort and had substantial shortcomings in meeting their commitments. Indeed, several denominations are still racially segregated, and many, as this consultation highlighted, failed to focus on and emphasize the ongoing work that the pursuit of reconciliation requires.

Since the original TRC in South Africa came to a close, appalling violence has continued. Inequality is increasing, the rich have maintained their wealth while the poor continue to live on scraps, the education system is failing, striking miners are gunned down by police, obscene spending is justified on the president's private property, and corruption runs rampant.<sup>713</sup> Why, asked some of the churches present at

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of apartheid that were named during the TRC process, have suggested that “the process of providing measures for amnesty and other benefits for perpetrators has not been balanced by an equal focus on the provision of redress for victims” (<http://mg.co.za/article/2012-11-16-00-reparations-still-on-the-back-foot>. Accessed February 21, 2015).

<sup>713</sup> Desmond Tutu made these observations in “Tutu: 'Unfinished Business' of the TRC's Healing.”

this re-enactment, did they assume that a neo-liberal government would be the agent of reconciliation? Neo-liberalism operates, after all, on assumptions of individual competition, on freedom *from* the other rather than communal belonging to each other, and on the myth that government is somehow neutral in ordering and structuring society.

Despite some of the TRC's shortcomings, one cannot understate the importance of this process for the South African context. It proved to be a much needed "pressure valve" that helped to remove the shroud of secrecy so that the past could be confronted honestly in order to imagine the possibility of a new future. Whatever its shortcomings, I am not sure whether it is fair to pin them on the TRC process itself. Rather, I would argue that such shortcomings were largely a result in the way in which the TRC findings and suggestions were handled, as well as the lack of follow through since.

The TRC process does, however, offer a concrete example regarding a theology of reconstruction or nation-building.

### *Other theologies based on a Theology of Reconstruction and Nation-building*

Since the transition from apartheid to the democratic South Africa there have been many others who have sought to explore and articulate a theological account in how the church can and ought to relate to the new state using the theology of reconstruction or nation-building motif as a basic building block. The basic logic of this motif suggests that the church, in seeking to be a responsible agent for change in the new South Africa, is to help the young democracy learn how to govern and rule in the interests of all who live in its borders.

In this section I will briefly look at and summarize three examples. These examples reveal some of the common traits of such a theology, which will be highlighted in the next chapter's closer analysis.

Simanga R. Kumalo

One theologian who has been articulating a theology based on “reconstruction” or “nation-building” is Simanga R. Kumalo.<sup>714</sup> Kumalo accepts the premise that a new theological approach was required for South Africa’s new political dispensation that moves beyond those that existed before 1994. Kumalo argues that, rather than being co-opted by or absorbed into the state (what might be described as “State Theology”) or seeing the state as an enemy, (i.e., a theology of resistance or opposition, which became a typical way of depicting Liberation or Prophetic Theology), there needs to be a theology of assistance<sup>715</sup> – assisting the state in embracing “good governance” that speaks into how decisions and authority are exercised.<sup>716</sup>

Kumalo, in referring to the 2002 World Bank report, describes “good governance” as that which possesses six key dimensions: voice and accountability, political stability and the absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption.<sup>717</sup> With this in view, he then says that “[t]he bigger vision that the church upholds is not of democracy but of good governance, which can be achieved through a system of democracy, but for it to do that it needs to be monitored and supported.”<sup>718</sup> The ecclesiological function of the church, one can therefore conclude, in embracing a theology of assistance is to act 1) as a state partner in helping to create the conditions necessary for good governance, and 2) as a watch dog rooted as part of the country’s civil society. Kumalo suggests as examples of the former is educating the people in the ways of “responsible citizenship”, embracing and putting into practice democratic practices within the church itself, empowering the church to be a stakeholder of democracy, and creating strategic alliances and partnerships.

The crux of the problem, for Kumalo, in relating to the new, post-1994 government is that the “church is confronted with the question of how it can penetrate, analyze and influence this impenetrable and quarantined form of

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<sup>714</sup> Another term that is commonly used is that of “development”. Kumalo, for example, has been a product of and involved in the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s “Theology and Development” program that is a central part of the UKZN’s School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics. He has also been the Director of Ujamaa, a centre for Community Development and Research.

<sup>715</sup> Kumalo, “The People Shall Govern!: Now They Have Only the Possibility to Vote,” 13.

<sup>716</sup> Kumalo, “The People Shall Govern!: Now They Have Only the Possibility to Vote,” 12.

<sup>717</sup> Kumalo, “The People Shall Govern!: Now They Have Only the Possibility to Vote,” 12.

<sup>718</sup> Kumalo, “The People Shall Govern!: Now They Have Only the Possibility to Vote,” 12.

government with its principle of participatory governance as displayed in governance in God's household."<sup>719</sup> Part of the problem, he argues, is that the church after 1994 has settled back into its denominational enclaves. For example, Kumalo highlights with sadness Desmond Tutu's comment made after introducing Nelson Mandela as the newly elected President of the democratic South Africa on the Union Building in April 1994: "Now I am going back to the church to do the real business of the church and leave politics to those well qualified to do it."<sup>720</sup> In this way Kumalo mourns the move away from such political involvement the same way as Villa-Vicencio warns, which we already noted earlier: "To leave politics to the politicians... is as inherently dangerous as it is to reduce theology to a specific political ideology that ultimately results in a marriage between church and state."<sup>721</sup>

In response to what Kumalo sees as an error in how the church responded to the shift from apartheid to democracy, he argues for the need to be in "critical solidarity" with the state. This notion has already been explored above, and so I will not take too much time to articulate the general premise here. Suffice to say, Kumalo believes this stance helps and supports the state in the path of embracing and exhibiting "good governance" while also holding it accountable. To do so, however, requires regular and ongoing conversation with the state.

Interestingly – and ironically – Kumalo claims that "critical solidarity" is built on the foundations of Liberation Theology and theologies of reconstruction as it continues to emphasize God's preferential option for the poor.<sup>722</sup> "It also calls for obeying the laws of the country only if they are not contrary to the laws of God."<sup>723</sup> His claim is ironic in that, two paragraphs earlier, he makes the claim that there needs to be a new theology as well as a new approach regarding church-state relations<sup>724</sup> than those theologies of the past that were primarily oppositional (i.e., Liberation Theology).

Kumalo attempts to make the case for the church's involvement in politics by drawing on the example of an *imbizo* – "a public community gathering under the local

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<sup>719</sup> Kumalo, "'The People Shall Govern': Now They Have Only the Possibility to Vote," 9.

<sup>720</sup> Kumalo takes this quote from Challenge, 22 June, 1994. Kumalo, "'The People Shall Govern': Now They Have Only the Possibility to Vote," 5.

<sup>721</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 20.

<sup>722</sup> Kumalo, "'The People Shall Govern': Now They Have Only the Possibility to Vote," 13.

<sup>723</sup> Kumalo, "'The People Shall Govern': Now They Have Only the Possibility to Vote," 13.

<sup>724</sup> Kumalo, "'The People Shall Govern': Now They Have Only the Possibility to Vote," 13.

leader.”<sup>725</sup> It is, he argues, a method in which the church could seek to influence the ruling authorities. An *Indaba* is a similar practice that is called by the king in order to address his people.<sup>726</sup> Such practices, argues Kumalo, provide opportunities for the church to be a voice to those in power. And he, perhaps idealistically, believes that “[t]he democratic government of South Africa is committed to creating the spaces for communities to dialogue with public representatives through *izimbizo* [the plural form of *imbizo*].”<sup>727</sup> Thus the Christian church must, he argues, find a way of participating in such spaces. “In this way,” he says, “it will enhance social cohesion, build social capital and help promote people’s rights in order to improve life holistically.”<sup>728</sup> Kumalo laments, however, that the Christian church in South Africa has become so fragmented that it is difficult to speak in one unified voice, which thus dilutes the potential influence the church could exert on the ruling authorities towards the change it desires.<sup>729</sup>

Although more reflections will be provided in the next chapter, it is important to highlight a few of the tendencies and assumptions at play. First, given Kumalo’s emphasis in participating and supporting the development of “good governance”, he argues that democratic practices ought to find their way into the life and witness of the church itself; an entity, he suggests, in which such practices have often not existed.<sup>730</sup> And yet he recognizes the ways in which *izimbizo* have not and often are not democratic in nature. “The *imbizo* can be hierarchical rather than egalitarian.”<sup>731</sup> Although Kumalo maintains that *izimbizo* can offer spaces in which communities can hold their leaders accountable, he does recognize that “the *izimbizo* can also be a means through which leaders maintain political stability and the *status quo*, and also strengthen their hegemony. This is because in these fora, a leader’s address to his community often receives great support and little contestation.”<sup>732</sup> And so, although Kumalo wants to explore ways in which the church could provide a voice to those in power as well as an example in embracing democratic practices, he seems to contradict himself in how this could be consistently (and faithfully?) done.

<sup>725</sup> Kumalo, "Christianity and Political Engagement in Post-Apartheid South Africa," 220.

<sup>726</sup> Kumalo, "Christianity and Political Engagement in Post-Apartheid South Africa," 220.

<sup>727</sup> Kumalo, "Christianity and Political Engagement in Post-Apartheid South Africa," 228.

<sup>728</sup> Kumalo, "Christianity and Political Engagement in Post-Apartheid South Africa," 228.

<sup>729</sup> Kumalo, "Christianity and Political Engagement in Post-Apartheid South Africa," 227.

<sup>730</sup> Kumalo, "'The People Shall Govern': Now They Have Only the Possibility to Vote," 14.

<sup>731</sup> Kumalo, "Christianity and Political Engagement in Post-Apartheid South Africa," 221.

<sup>732</sup> Kumalo, "Christianity and Political Engagement in Post-Apartheid South Africa," 221.

This highlights the second point: that the church must find ways of effectively bringing about the social change it deems necessary. The most effective way, we can deduce based on Kumalo's arguments, would be for the church, in order to influence the development of the social order, to speak and try to influence, as one unified voice, a leader or government.

And third, although Kumalo argues for the church to be "politically involved" in developing a culture of participation in the process of building a democracy in South Africa,<sup>733</sup> the actual activity of politics still rests on the government shoulders. Indeed, power itself lies in the hands of the governing authorities. The church's role, therefore, is to find ways of helping – assisting – the state govern in a more just manner, encouraging citizens of the country to participate in providing the desired mandate to the state, and to hold the government accountable when it fails to rule in the interests of its people. The state, however, is still the entity in charge of acting politically.

Anthony Egan

Anthony Egan provides another example of a theology centred around reconstruction or nation-building. Egan, a Jesuit priest in South Africa, has spent considerable time writing and reflecting on issues of governance and politics from a faith-based (Catholic) perspective. Perhaps one of his best writings on the subject is a chapter entitled "Governance beyond Rhetoric: the South African Challenge to the African Synod" in *Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace: The Second African Synod*.<sup>734</sup>

In his chapter, Egan begins with a concern about how effective and realistic the African Synod's comments regarding good governance might be in light of the complexities inherent in the South African context. He notes that the 2006 *Lineamenta* affirms the importance of a political role for the church in Africa.

It stresses that the historical, political, and economic dilemmas of Africa are those of post-colonial states facing the tensions created by a past dominated by the imposition

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<sup>733</sup> Kumalo, "'The People Shall Govern': Now They Have Only the Possibility to Vote," 1.

<sup>734</sup> Anthony Egan, "Governance Beyond Rhetoric: The South African Challenge to the African Synod," in *Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace: The Second African Synod*, ed. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011).

of a Western political dispensation that many national liberation movements (themselves products of the colonial system) adopted at independence. The effect was often political fragmentation and dissociation. This effect became manifest in anti-colonialism expressed in colonial language, critique, *and* imitation of the West.<sup>735</sup>

And so how does the church respond to this reality? Speaking from his position as a Catholic in South Africa, Egan recognizes that the Catholic Church cannot unilaterally and categorically pronounce on matters of governance. Others who are not Catholic would raise caution about a church attempting to be triumphalist, using its many resources as a cover for proselytism.<sup>736</sup> The African Synod, however, has stated that “Africa needs saints in high political office: saintly politicians who will clean the continent of corruption, work for the good of the people, and know how to galvanize other men and women of good will from outside the Church to join hands against the common evils that beset our nations” (no. 23). In light of this statement, Egan seeks to demonstrate how the South African Bishops’ Conference attempts to influence the policies of South Africa’s government.

Egan succinctly, yet astutely, describes the political climate in South Africa and observes that the Catholic Church, as it is declining, has difficulty in influencing government directly.<sup>737</sup> As such, Egan shares in how the South African Bishops’ Conference attempts to influence the policies of the government through its South African Bishops’ Conference Parliamentary Liaison Office (CPLO). The goal of the CPLO is to help the hierarchy of the church shape and influence government policy and legislature.<sup>738</sup>

Egan recognizes that the church in South Africa is forced to learn to play by a new set of ground rules. He identifies three guiding principles that Robert Audi articulates for church-state relations:

- 1) The libertarian principle: that the state must tolerate any and all religions to function within its borders;
- 2) The egalitarian principle: that no preference can be given to any religion over another;

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<sup>735</sup> Egan, "Governance Beyond Rhetoric," 95.

<sup>736</sup> Egan, "Governance beyond Rhetoric", 96.

<sup>737</sup> Egan, "Governance beyond Rhetoric", 100.

<sup>738</sup> Egan, "Governance beyond Rhetoric", 100.



- 3) The neutrality principle: that the state should neither favor nor disfavor religion as such.<sup>739</sup>

Egan recognizes the secular nature of the new South African state. He indicates, however, that this does not mean “that religions should stay out of the public arena. Rather, their engagement cannot simply be based on moral claims rooted in internal religious doctrines alone; they need to be expressed fully or partly in secular terms comprehensible to any secular person.”<sup>740</sup> Indeed, this is part of the reason for the emergence of “Public Theology” in the South African context.<sup>741</sup> This highlights the overlap between “theology of reconstruction or nation-building” and “Public Theology”. But we will explore “Public Theology” more fully later on in this chapter.

Egan’s desire is for the Christian faith to be present in the public arena. His desire is based on several assumptions. First, he assumes that the state possesses the responsibility for ordering society in an objective a manner as possible. It is the state and its laws that inform and determine how one is supposed to act. And yet, even though it directly contradicts the truth of neutrality that he highlights from Audi, there is an assumption in Egan’s chapter that society ought to be structured and ordered based on Christian morals. Egan assumes that there is wisdom in the way Christians are called to act in society that should form the broader society. Although I do not dispute his assertion that there is wisdom within Christianity, its tradition, and its theology, the logic of his argument suggests that the state should enforce such wisdom through its laws and governance.

Second, which is closely related to the first, Egan assumes that the church’s role is to try to influence the state in the ordering of society toward a more “Christian” moral standard. The most effective and realistic way for the church to fulfill its political role, argues Egan, is to influence the ruling government towards a more Christian ethic. This is the stated mission of the Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office.<sup>742</sup>

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<sup>739</sup> Egan, “Governance beyond Rhetoric”, 102-103.

<sup>740</sup> Egan, “Governance beyond Rhetoric”, 103.

<sup>741</sup> For a good introduction of the emergence and character of Public Theology in the South African context see Etienne de Villiers, “Public Theology in the South African Context,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 5 (2011).

<sup>742</sup> Egan, “Governance Beyond Rhetoric,” 100.

Third, it is assumed that the hierarchy of the church is that which influences the state.<sup>743</sup> The dialogue and influence between the church and the state, in other words, occurs between the upper echelons of both entities. Those who compose the church, the laity, cannot or are not expected to be responsible in influencing the state in the ordering of society, unless, of course, they are one of the saints who find themselves in high political offices.<sup>744</sup>

Egan's depiction of the ways in which the church participates in the public space continues to rely heavily on a Constantinian or Christendom imagination. Egan assumes that, ideally, there ought to be an alliance between the church and the state, thus bringing together the entities responsible for morality and politics respectively. The church's role in this alliance is to try to influence the state to adopt public policy for the common good that are compatible with the Christian faith.

#### Kairos Southern Africa

Lastly, as we look at theologies that have as their foundation a theology of reconstruction or nation-building we will look at the emergence of Kairos Southern Africa (Kairos SA). Characterizing Kairos SA as arising from a theology of reconstruction or nation-building may be disputed. It obviously seeks to build on the legacy of the Kairos Document, and thus of its proposed "Prophetic Theology" it offered in 1985. In analyzing one of its most prominent documents that brought Kairos SA onto the South African scene, this work will suggest that it shares many similarities and assumptions with a theology of reconstruction or nation-building that we have looked at thus far.

Kairos SA began in 2011 as an attempt to re-ignite Prophetic Theology, a prophetic voice, or a "kairos consciousness" in the theological and ecclesial scene in

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<sup>743</sup> Egan notes how the new democratic political dispensation in South Africa is one of the challenges that face the (Catholic) church and its ecclesial structure. For example, although he does not argue that the new political dispensation is negative, he does admit: "Quite rightly, the church and figures like Pope Pius IX recognized that democracy would undermine religious authority. It did, and it has" (Egan, "Governance beyond Rhetoric", 102). Egan also recognizes that, if the church would make a suggestion as to which way a church member should vote, Catholics would at best openly ignore the hierarchy or at worst leave the church (Ibid., 100). A tension, in other words, exists between the new political dispensation of democracy with the hierarchical ecclesial structure of the Catholic Church.

<sup>744</sup> Egan, "Governance Beyond Rhetoric," 96.

South(ern) Africa.<sup>745</sup> Of particular interest for our purposes is a document which Kairos SA released in 2012 entitled “Kairos SA Word to the ANC.... In these times”.<sup>746</sup> Kairos SA wrote this document as a reflection upon the African National Congress’ (ANC) centenary celebration. Analyzing this document helps to better understand the mentality from which it emerges. Ultimately this will help better understand the post-apartheid political theology imagination that has taken root.

In many ways the document reads like a pastoral letter – a letter from a chaplain to the ruling party, the ANC. It begins by laying the ground work to be read as such: that the letter is brought to the ruling party and its members in “appreciation and gratitude for you and in a spirit of true friendship, where we can both congratulate you and raise some concerns as friends...”.<sup>747</sup> It then continues to offer congratulations for the historical longevity of the ANC as well as offering a word of appreciation and gratitude for what it has done, including its role in the struggle against colonialism and apartheid.<sup>748</sup>

The document then goes on to reflect on the historical relationship between the church and the ANC. As ruling parties tend to re-narrate history in a way that highlights their role in significant events while downplaying the roles of others, this document reminds the ANC of the role the church also played in the quest for South Africa’s liberation.<sup>749</sup> Indeed, it even attempts to demonstrate how the church laid some of the foundation for the emergence of the ANC: “The mention of these Christian witnesses in the struggle for justice and democracy is, in part, a recognition of the role of and particular engagement by the Christian Church which has been abiding from before and in a way foundational to the formation of the ANC in 1912.”<sup>750</sup>

The document goes on to describe and narrate the way in which the church – or at least parts of the church – and the ANC have walked together throughout the ANC’s history, challenging the oppressive realities of colonialism and apartheid in search of “gospel values” such as justice, equality, and the dignity that belongs to all

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<sup>745</sup> For more information see Kairos Southern Africa, <https://kairossouthernafrica.wordpress.com>.

<sup>746</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC.... In These Times," <https://kairossouthernafrica.wordpress.com/2012/08/01/kairos-logo/>. Accessed December 22, 2015.

<sup>747</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 2.

<sup>748</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 3-4.

<sup>749</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 4.

<sup>750</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 5.

people under God.<sup>751</sup> Much of this has been highlighted earlier and so do not need to spend more time on this particular part of the narrative. Needless to say, Kairos SA paints a picture whereby the (prophetic) church walked hand-in-hand with the ANC in a common journey towards a more hopeful future of freedom and liberation.

The document then narrates “our walk together since 1994”. It begins by noting the shift towards a theology of reconstruction, seeking to find “middle axioms” to help move society from one stage to another. “In this regard some of the Christian leaders were drawn into Government to be part of the process of the transformation and reconstruction of our society.”<sup>752</sup> This shift towards a more constructive (or reconstructive) approach, it notes, highlighted the move towards being in “critical solidarity” with the new democratic government. Interestingly, however, Kairos SA notes how this stance either a) led to the government co-opting church leaders, or b) has caused many church activists embrace positions of “critical distance” “between themselves and the new democratic state which turned them into ‘wilderness prophets’ who spoke ‘truth to power’ with very little impact on the state, if any.”<sup>753</sup>

The document continues with a sense of sadness in how the state has shifted from seeing the church as a “partner”, under the leadership of Nelson Mandela, to seeing the church with suspicion, thus being less willing to act as “partners”.<sup>754</sup>

The latest development we have noticed, of reward for those who support the ANC, especially during elections, comes closer to the concept of ‘State Theology’ where some church leaders are at the ‘service of the party’ in a party political sense rather than be at the ‘service of the people’. Here, the prophetic voice dies at the ‘altar’ of the party and turns church leaders into uncritical ‘praise singers’ of the party.<sup>755</sup>

Thus, given this shift, Kairos SA recommits itself to be first and foremost in solidarity with the poor and marginalized in society.<sup>756</sup> As such, rather than trying to “speak truth to power”, the document suggests that

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<sup>751</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 6.

<sup>752</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 9.

<sup>753</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 9. Although we will pick this up in the next chapter, we should note the way in which this latter posture is almost dismissed because of its ineffectiveness and the little impact it has had on the state. One can conclude, therefore, that being “effective” and having “impact” is a significant determination regarding ones approach both towards the state as well as the church’s role in society.

<sup>754</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 9.

<sup>755</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 9.

<sup>756</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 9.

we now realise that ‘speaking truth to people’ and becoming involved in organisations of the people is probably a much more appropriate response, since those in power rarely respond positively to a truth that is being spoken to them. We were hoping that the language of ‘power’ would be transformed into the language of ‘service’ but we have been disappointed that this has not yet happened in any significant way.<sup>757</sup>

The Kairos SA document attempts to explain how a church that simply collaborates with the party or the state can be of no use to the party regarding its national strategic objective as the objective of democracy requires “constructive critical voices within civil society to save the very revolutionary objectives of the party”<sup>758</sup> lest it slips into the temptation towards sectarianism and self-interest rather than seeking the interests of the people.<sup>759</sup>

“Prophetic Theology,” it argues, “is therefore about being in solidarity with and in struggle with the poorest of the poor, since that is where Jesus is to be found. It is also about ‘speaking truth to people’ since this is the only language that will truly set us all free.”<sup>760</sup> Ironically, however, Kairos SA wrote this letter to the ANC, South Africa’s ruling political party. Thus, even though it states its desire to speak to the people, Kairos SA cannot overcome the temptation to continue to “speak truth to power” even though it recognizes the problems of such an approach.

The rest of the document then offers a pastoral word to the ANC as well as words of caution and concern. The first comment is an encouragement against factionalism within the ANC. It notes how factionalism and disunity within the ruling party leads to struggles of self-interest which affects leadership, issues of governance, as well as “service delivery”, all of which, it suggests, does not ultimately serve the poorest communities.<sup>761</sup> It is noteworthy how Kairos SA’s first word of concern, which as noted above already fails to follow its own desire to speak to the people and instead speaks to those “in power”, focuses on the way in which the party rules and governs. The document even draws a lesson from Matthew’s gospel where it states that “a house divided against itself cannot stand” (Matt. 12:25) as a way to encourage better party political management.<sup>762</sup>

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<sup>757</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 10.

<sup>758</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 10.

<sup>759</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 10.

<sup>760</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 10.

<sup>761</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 11.

<sup>762</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 11.

In Kairos SA's "word" of concern and caution we see its basic assumption: the government and the state, with whom the church can partner, are *the* political actors in determining the way in which people in society should relate. The church's "political" role is to offer advice, and in some cases pressure, in the way in which the government goes about its role and duty of ruling. This foundational assumption then determines the rest of the concerns in the document such as the growing gap between the rich and poor, maintaining order and structure as security and intelligence forces carry out their responsibility, corruption, social cohesion, education, and so forth.

One example helps to demonstrate this assumption clearly. The fourth "concern" that Kairos SA presents in its document pertains to "corruption", especially as seen through the "arms deal".<sup>763</sup> Kairos SA raises its concern, supposedly on behalf of the church, but does not question the procurement of weapons. Nor does it raise the ethical question of having the first democratically elected government spending close to 30 billion Rands in military acquisitions, recognizing the high levels of poverty, lack of education, and lack of housing that are all unfortunate remnants of apartheid. Instead, the concern that Kairos SA raises is that corruption seems to have occurred in the procurement process; and this, the document argues, undermines and compromises leadership and the government.

Corruption negatively impacts on the psyche and morality of our people, particularly that of the youth (who now believe that this was the only way to make quick money without much effort). Corruption seems to have now spread into party political activities where corrupt means of campaigning/contestation for power (votes, support, etc.) are used, thus compromising the leadership before they even go into government.<sup>764</sup>

This example demonstrates several assumed traits. The first is the acceptance that the military and its weapons are a perceived requirement of a nation-state, and the procurement of weapons to support the military is simply accepted. Second, the Kairos SA document depicts the state as the political actor. The church, in its desire to be supportive (or in "solidarity", even if critically), can seemingly only offer a word that encourages the state to pay attention to the way it governs (i.e., governance

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<sup>763</sup> The "Arms deal" refers to the South African government weapons procurement process which sought to purchase weapons such as fighter jets, war ships, submarines, helicopters, and so forth. Although the exact amount spent is unknown due to many allegations of corruption, it is alleged that over 30 billion Rands were spent in this procurements process. For more information on the Arms Deal, see <http://www.corruptionwatch.org.za/timeline-of-the-arms-deal/> (accessed January 11, 2016).

<sup>764</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 12.

practices). Corruption (through the “arms deal”) threatens responsible governance. And third, which is closely related to the first two, the church must be realistic in what it can hold the government and the state accountable to. Thus, the document does not even call into question the ethics of purchasing weapons of war.

Thus, in response to the voiced concerns presented, Kairos SA urges more direct communication between the state and the church so that a common understanding between the two can be nurtured.<sup>765</sup> In this way, it notes, the ANC can embody its mandate as complementary to that of God’s kingdom.<sup>766</sup> And this connection, wittingly or not, is drawn through the document’s concluding “word of hope and blessing”:

We congratulate the ANC for all it has achieved in South Africa during the last hundred years. The movement has been a great source of hope for the vast majority of our people.

Our hope is rooted in our Lord Jesus Christ who has overcome death and for whom nothing is impossible.<sup>767</sup>

This “word of hope and blessing” begs the question whether the document intentionally connects the hope of which the ANC has been a source with the hope that is rooted “in our Lord Jesus Christ”.<sup>768</sup>

Like the previous examples, the Kairos SA’s “Word to the ANC... in these times” document demonstrates the foundational assumptions of a theology of reconstruction or nation-building. It assumes that a) there is an alliance between the church and the state; b) that the state is responsible for the political realities within its borders; c) that the church itself and its role does not participate in the political realm as such; and d) that the church, if it has political concerns, must find ways of influencing and encouraging those who are responsible for the politics of the country.

### *The Rise of Public Theology in South Africa*

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<sup>765</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, “A Word to the ANC, in These Times,” 13.

<sup>766</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, “A Word to the ANC, in These Times,” 13.

<sup>767</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, “A Word to the ANC, in These Times,” 15.

<sup>768</sup> Inevitably this draws attention to the comment made by the current President of the ANC and South Africa, Jacob Zuma, that the ANC will rule until Jesus returns.

It has been argued that the discourse surrounding “reconstruction” or “nation-building” has been prevalent in South African theology after 1994 (although it already began in 1992 with Villa-Vicencio’s book). It has shaped much of the early years of the “new” South Africa. Since the mid-2000s, however, “Public Theology” has become another theological persuasion and approach that has also become prominent in the South African context.

Public Theology as a theological discipline emerged in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through prominent thinkers such as David Tracy and Jürgen Habermas.<sup>769</sup> Public Theology is concerned with the relevance of the Christian faith and the way in which it addresses matters in society.<sup>770</sup> Public Theology has become a theological expression primarily in democratic, liberal (or neo-liberal) societies where freedom of religion is typically assumed. The question that emerges in such contexts is how can or does Christian theology influence society – i.e., “the public”?

We do not have the opportunity or the space to explore in detail the intricacies and nuances of the different arguments for, as well as criticisms of, Public Theology. Suffice to say that an integral element of Public Theology is the way “public” is understood.<sup>771</sup>

The “public” in Public Theology does not simply refer to the citizens of a country, thus making it a form of “people’s theology”. Rather, “public” often refers to the space where different spheres intersect and interact: citizens, business, and the political/government.<sup>772</sup> Thus, as Clive Pearson puts it, Public Theology seeks to be a theology that is relevant for all humanity, not just Christians.

Public theology is located as one voice among many in the marketplace of ideas. Theology is no longer the only voice in the public domain and it does not have a

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<sup>769</sup> See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989) and David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

<sup>770</sup> Clive Pearson, "Unpublished Notes from Clive Pearson," (Strategic Research Centre for Public and Contextual Theology).

<sup>771</sup> For an excellent examination of how “public” is understood see Dirkie Smit, "What Does Public Mean? Questions with a View to Public Theology," in *Christian in Public: Aims, Methodologies, and Issues in Public Theology*, ed. Len Hansen (Stellenbosch, South Africa: African SUN MeDIA, 2007).

<sup>772</sup> It should be noted that one of the central tenets in how these three spheres would interact, for Habermas, was that of rationality and the ability for true conversation rather than conversation through manipulation. Thus, one of the questions that arise in today’s context is whether such interaction is, indeed, possible because of the myth of being able to attain information without some form of coercion.



privileged status. Unlike other types of theology, it does not seek to 'convert', but is concerned with the well-being of society.<sup>773</sup>

In the South African context, as elsewhere, Public Theology has become quite popular in the past decade or so. It has, however, been a contested theological practice. There has been much debate both about the purpose of Public Theology as well as its methodology.

In 2011, the *International Journal of Public Theology* dedicated a whole issue to the emergence of and debate within South African Public Theology. William Storrar's visit to South Africa provided the impetus for a two-day symposium in which several theologians reflected on the theme "Responsible South African Public Theology in a Global Era: Perspectives and Proposals".<sup>774</sup> This symposium provided (and provides) a good and interesting window into Public Theology in the South African context along with its criticisms.

Etienne de Villiers, in his article "Public Theology in the South African Context", begins by noting how many of the Afrikaans Reformed churches, and indeed all mainstream churches influenced by the Reformed tradition, assumed a public role during the apartheid years guided by what he describes as a "transformational approach". "Both the Afrikaans churches and other mainstream churches in the Reformed fold were convinced that they had God's calling to transform society in the light of the gospel of Christ."<sup>775</sup> This theocratic ideal and assumption among the Afrikaans Reformed churches arose from section 36 of the *Confessio Belgica*. As such, they saw the state as an institution of God that is there to serve God by protecting Christianity against other false religions by "listening to the voice of the church and by striving to serve Christian values in its policies and actions."<sup>776</sup> This, as we have seen, was the foundation for "State Theology".

The dawn of the new political dispensation, notes de Villiers, changed everything. "Within a short time span it became apparent that the conviction that Christians have a calling to transform society in accordance with their gospel had almost completely lost the self-evident nature it had for Reformed Christians in the

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<sup>773</sup> Pearson, "Unpublished Notes from Clive Pearson."

<sup>774</sup> Etienne de Villiers, "Editorial: Special Issue-Responsible South African Public Theology in a Global Era," *International Journal of Public Theology* 5 (2011): 1.

<sup>775</sup> Villiers, "Public Theology in the South African Context," 7.

<sup>776</sup> Villiers, "Public Theology in the South African Context," 7.

previous political dispensation.”<sup>777</sup> De Villiers highlights two examples in how the churches, especially the Afrikaans churches, were affected by this shift in political dispensation. The first was the change of the old constitution from its overtly theocratic approach. The second was the loss of a sympathetic ear of those in power.<sup>778</sup> “All of this,” he notes, “amounted to a severe loss of social status and public influence for the churches.”<sup>779</sup> In essence, the view that society should be transformed by the Christian gospel, argues de Villiers, is deemed to be politically illegitimate and discredited by the new liberal constitution.<sup>780</sup> Likewise, the new government, the ANC, has seemingly adopted a more protagonist approach to the churches and their calls and suggestions to the state.<sup>781</sup> Thus, the question arises as to what role can or should the church play in this new liberal democracy? De Villiers summarizes the dilemma well.

Those churches and theologians who supported the liberation struggle in the previous political dispensation in their rejection of the apartheid regime predominantly made use of the prophetic mode of public discourse, which they interpreted in exclusively oppositional terms. The transition to the new democratic dispensation brought about the political liberation they strived for. On the one hand, to maintain the oppositional prophetic mode of public discourse in responding to a majority government with whom they have sympathy and whose policies aim at the consolidation of that political liberation seems hardly appropriate. On the other hand, it is apparent that the government has not succeeded in overcoming large-scale poverty and joblessness and bringing about a more prosperous and equitable existence for all South Africans. Those churches and theologians who supported the apartheid policies and security measures of the Nationalist government now find themselves in a situation they are not used to; they have no allegiance to the present government and tend to be critical of many of the measures the government introduced to promote transformation in society. Both groups of churches and theologians are uncertain about the appropriate mode of public discourse to adopt in the democratic South Africa.<sup>782</sup>

This dilemma, however, does highlight some clues that we will pick up in the next chapter – the way in which the church a) relates to those in power, and b) the way in which change is assumed to be brought about, i.e., through the state.

Although a contested notion, de Villiers highlights the way in which Public Theology has been helpful in South Africa’s new context. He notes, for example, the

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<sup>777</sup> Villiers, “Public Theology in the South African Context,” 9.

<sup>778</sup> Villiers, “Public Theology in the South African Context,” 9.

<sup>779</sup> Villiers, “Public Theology in the South African Context,” 9.

<sup>780</sup> Villiers, “Public Theology in the South African Context,” 10.

<sup>781</sup> Villiers, “Public Theology in the South African Context,” 11.

<sup>782</sup> Villiers, “Public Theology in the South African Context,” 12.

significance of Jürgen Habermas' understanding of "the public sphere".<sup>783</sup> William Storrar, in his presentation during the symposium, provides a similar understanding to that of Habermas:

A truly public theology is to be found operating in the public sphere, the place of public communication and argumentation. If, with Habermas, we agree that the public sphere is, 'a domain of our social life in which public opinion can be formed', where any and all citizens can gather freely and without coercion to consider matters of general interest, then a public theology must be a discourse that circulates in this public sphere and both informs and is informed by public opinion on public issues.<sup>784</sup>

"Public", therefore, in Storrar's (and Habermas') definition moves beyond a simple understanding as "audience" and more towards a more modern political meaning of the "public sphere".<sup>785</sup> It refers to that life we share and have in common with all people in society. "Public life is where we show a willingness to listen to strangers, compromise with them and give of our selves in the endless search for the public good."<sup>786</sup> The private, the public, and the political are, according to Storrar's view, interdependent; they fail or flourish together.<sup>787</sup>

In wrestling with the notion and understanding of "public", which is obviously central to *Public Theology*, Nico Koopman, in response to Storrar, highlights three different and contested understandings regarding "public". The first, which is the more typical definition, understands "public" "as the sphere where a normative vision underlying contemporary democratic life in democratic societies is developed."<sup>788</sup> A second understanding is that which "has to do with life in general, life in the world, the whole of creation, history, culture, social life, reality and humanity."<sup>789</sup> The third, which is more vague, understands "public" as that which "presupposes that all theological discourse is public in the sense that it addresses specific audiences or

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<sup>783</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989).

<sup>784</sup> William Storrar, "The Naming of Parts: Doing Public Theology in a Global Era," *International Journal of Public Theology* 5 (2011): 27-8.

<sup>785</sup> Storrar, "The Naming of Parts," 27.

<sup>786</sup> Storrar, "The Naming of Parts," 28.

<sup>787</sup> Storrar, "The Naming of Parts," 28.

<sup>788</sup> Nico Koopman, "'Public Spirit: The Global Citizen's Gift'--a Response to William Storrar," *International Journal of Public Theology* 5 (2011): 94.

<sup>789</sup> Koopman, "'Public Spirit: The Global Citizen's Gift,'" 94.

publics, like David Tracy's typology of the three publics of theology, namely society, academy and church."<sup>790</sup>

De Villiers demonstrates the way in which such "public" emphases have emerged institutionally in South Africa with the development of the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology, connected to the University of Stellenbosch, as well as the Centre for Public Theology at the University of Pretoria.<sup>791</sup> He notes that the focus of the former is to strengthen "the constructive role in all publics of a democratic society,"<sup>792</sup> whereas the latter seeks "to assist the church in understanding the national and global context and the impact it has on the church itself, and getting more clarity of its public responsibility and the best ways to fulfill it."<sup>793</sup> Thus, as one can see, Public Theology in the South African context has largely focused on exploring the role of the church in a democratic, liberal, pluralist society. Given its prominence and historical centrality in the "old" South Africa, it is no surprise that the historically Afrikaans Reformed linked institutions – Stellenbosch University and the University of Pretoria – have been central in exploring this question in the "new" South Africa as they are the ones who have to wrestle most with what the church's new role is in the "new" South Africa.

The next chapter will offer a more in depth analysis regarding Public Theology. We can, however, already highlight one characteristic – the social location of such a theological expression. Public Theology generally looks through a theological lens at the way in which (civil) society, the category in which the church is placed, business, and government (or the political) relate, exploring the common vision that can guide all such activity. Such a persuasion, as the astute reader would notice, has as its focus the centre – what is described and defined as the "public", the intersection between the different social spheres. Such a persuasion, therefore, relies on practices and tendencies whereby "power" is understood to be at the centre and exerted outward. Thus the desire, inevitably, is to be in positions and places that could "influence" public practice, thought, or policy – locals of those who possess such "power".

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<sup>790</sup> Koopman, "'Public Spirit: The Global Citizen's Gift,'" 95.

<sup>791</sup> Etienne de Villiers, "Public Theology in the South African Context," *International Journal of Public Theology* 5 (2011): 17-20.

<sup>792</sup> Villiers, "Public Theology in the South African Context," 18.

<sup>793</sup> Villiers, "Public Theology in the South African Context," 20.

Such a persuasion creates a distinction between Public Theology, which takes place at the centre of power, which assumes to be rational, informed, and “responsible”, from those theologies that arise on the margins, which those in the centre may (often?) perceive as “angry” or “oppositional”. In response to Storrar’s presentation, for example, James Cochrane notes: “Storrar places theologies that directly represent public anger outside of his definition of public theology. They are, rather, ‘oppositional’ or protest theologies, not yet oriented towards the conditions of publicness, which depend upon a genuinely open and democratic public sphere.”<sup>794</sup> Public theology, Cochrane suggests, distinguishes – perhaps unintentionally – between whose voice, perspective, and orientation matters in society; it distinguishes between a “civil discourse” from a “prophetic discourse”.<sup>795</sup> Tinyiko Sam Maluleke voices a similar concern.

If there is an area in which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission failed, and failed spectacularly, it is in the area of national anger management. We are an angry people. This is an angry nation. Some of the angriest white as well as black people on earth live here. Some of the most violent people on earth are to be found here. Yet the TRC says we are a magnanimous lot. And we hear that it could have been worse—how much worse, we do not know. But we must ask whether public theology has really taken this anger into account, and indeed whether it can do so; whether it has the wherewithal to deal with raw, violent, messy and gruesome anger in our streets, in our hearts and in our souls; whether it has the capacity not only to listen to the recent catchy and emotive stories of calmed women and desperate men in front of media cameras or some high profile commission, but to consider seriously the reality backstage—our long, bitter, messy history and culture of killing and dying. The stories of the poor are written on their bodies, inscribed in souls and captured in the histories of dispossession and humiliation. Yet public theology seems to dismiss effortlessly local theologies such as black theology, African theology and liberation theology. I challenge the right of public theology to dismiss some local theologies (black, African and women’s) and our histories in one line reductionisms and clichés, and must question whether public theology is the most potent vehicle for dealing with the reality above. I am not sure that it is.<sup>796</sup>

Although Public Theology has become a theological lens that has helped some wrestle with the role of the church and its theology in South Africa’s new democratic, liberal (or neo-liberal) political dispensation, it is not without contestation.

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<sup>794</sup> James Cochrane, "Against the Grain: Responsible Public Theology in a Global Era," *International Journal of Public Theology* 5 (2011): 47.

<sup>795</sup> Cochrane, "Against the Grain," 47.

<sup>796</sup> Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, "The Elusive Public of Public Theology: A Response to William Storrar," *International Journal of Public Theology* 5 (2011): 89.

## *Conclusion*

This chapter has explored some of the ways in which the transition from the demise of apartheid to the “new” democratic South Africa have affected the church and its assumed role in society. It demonstrated how churches that were used to having power and influence – e.g., the DRC – were discredited for their role in supporting and justifying apartheid. Other churches, such as Pentecostal churches, largely retained their theological trajectory through the transition where they either largely ignored the socio/political realities and what or how the Gospel or Christian theology had to say about them, or they sought to become influential (often through the desire of being numerically large) so that they could influence the state and its policy makers. Pentecostal churches, should there be a desire to be socially relevant, sought to influence the state and the way it orders society. In this way, the KD’s depiction of “State Theology” and “Church Theology” remained even after the demise of the apartheid government.

This chapter also demonstrated what has probably been the largest theological transition – the shift from those who were engaged in “Prophetic” or Liberation Theology towards a more constructive or reconstructive form of theology. This shift arose out of the idealism and euphoria of moving beyond “the beast” and legacy of apartheid, and imagining the type of society South Africa could become. Thus much of South Africa’s theology since 1994 has been part of “theologies of reconstruction or nation-building” or, what has emerged in the last decade or so, Public Theologies.

What this chapter highlights, however, is the way “Prophetic Theology” has largely, if not totally, been left aside and has since dissipated since 1994. Part of the reason for this is due to the largely accepted portrayal of “Prophetic Theology” (or Liberation Theology) as primarily oppositional, resistant, and antagonistic. Thus, as Villa-Vicencio began to articulate such rationale already in 1992, which theologians who followed largely accepted, such theology was no longer deemed necessary. A new theology, therefore, was thought necessary; one that would be more constructive in working with the democratically elected government. What this widely accepted narrative fails to recognize, however, was the way in which Prophetic Theology in South Africa, rather than simply being oppositional, resistant, or antagonistic, embodied another form of politics desired within South African society, even in the

face of the old political regime. Post-apartheid theology has largely failed to recognize the way in which Prophetic Theology *was* constructive in embodying the way in which it wanted people to relate with one another.

5.

## Analysis of Prophetic Theology and post-apartheid political theology

The last four chapters have offered a description of the different forms of political theology in the South African context using the *Kairos Document* (KD) as a departure point. The first three chapters explored the different forms of theology that have justified, maintained, or challenged the status quo during the years of colonization and apartheid. Chapter four looked at the theological shift that has taken place since the end of apartheid. It showed how the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid also caused a shift in Prophetic Theology resulting in its disappearance, at worst, or its silence, at best, after 1994.

This chapter will further analyze Prophetic Theology and the way the shift into post-apartheid caused it to change its prophetic form. In particular this chapter will demonstrate how, even though the KD emerged through prophetic *practices* in that it arose out of an alternative political witness during apartheid, the *theological reflection* the KD offers accepts a theological framework that prevents the church from being or witnessing to an alternative political reality which makes it prophetic. Put differently, the “Prophetic Theology” that it offers, which is different than the prophetic practices from which it arose, falls back onto a *theological framework* that it sought to criticize in the first place (e.g., State Theology and Church Theology). This is apparent in Albert Nolan’s theology. Although he cogently argues for a liberative theology – a theology that is indeed “good news” (i.e., gospel) in challenging injustice while offering liberation to those who are downtrodden – we will see how he too falls into the trap of depicting the church as an apolitical entity that rests on the partnership with the state in the church’s desire to be relevant and socially engaged. Ultimately this fails to offer a theological framework that supports the church’s alternative



political witness. This is also the trap which, as this chapter will seek to demonstrate, post-apartheid theology in general has also fallen into thus failing to offer a prophetic witness in the South African context.

Of central importance of this investigation is the way in which the understanding of “politics” as such changed from the apartheid to the post-apartheid context. It is this shift that has affected the *embodied emancipatory practices* that offered an alternative political witness in the struggle against apartheid. This chapter will suggest that it has failed to offer a theological foundation for an alternative politics and therefore the possibility of a prophetic theology in South Africa’s post-apartheid context. Ultimately, this study will contend that post-apartheid political theology in South Africa has fallen into the trap of a Constantinian based imagination that functions from prescribed roles regarding the state and church where politics is the sole function of the state. It will also be argued that the concept of power that is being espoused in all of the post-apartheid theologies that have been described so far are at odds with the understanding that a truly prophetic theology should embody.

### *Analyzing “Prophetic Theology”*

To better understand possible reasons why Prophetic Theology has become silent in the post-apartheid era thus far, it is important to identify characteristics that already existed before 1994 that could have already set the stage for its change and virtual disappearance after 1994. This section will further analyze the *Kairos Document* itself along with the theology of Albert Nolan as one of its primary exponents before the end of apartheid. Analyzing these two sources will help provide some clues as to the way “Prophetic Theology” was articulated before 1994 along with possible reasons for its shift in the post-apartheid era.

#### *Kairos Document’s call for Prophetic Theology*

As noted in chapter three, the KD’s call or challenge to action was an attempt to encourage the church to offer hope in the midst of oppression and tyranny. This

hope, it argued, has its roots among those who are poor and oppressed, as God is with them. Thus, the action taken against forms of oppression and tyranny offer an embodied emancipatory performance, practices that already embody in the here and now the hope, dignity, and freedom desired in the future,<sup>797</sup> in which the KD then invites and challenges the church to participate. Such embodied practices gave expression to the hope of which the country, both oppressed and oppressor, was in need. The KD's attempt to explain "Prophetic Theology" was therefore a challenge to the church to participate in the struggle against apartheid.

And yet the KD's own depiction of "Prophetic Theology" as well as its challenge to the church highlights some inconsistencies regarding the type of theology it desired from those emancipatory practices of which it was a product; examples of which we already noted throughout South Africa's history in chapter three. The first of these inconsistencies pertains to the way in which the KD understood the state and the role of the church in relation to it. Already in its critique against "State Theology" the KD highlights not only the need of the state but its necessary authority as well. In its critique, the KD states:

But most revealing of all is the circumstances of the Roman Christians to whom Paul was writing. They were not revolutionaries. They were not trying to overthrow the State. They were not calling for a change of government. They were, what has been called, 'antinomians' or 'enthusiasts' and their belief was that Christians, and only Christians, were exonerated from obeying any State at all, any government or political authority at all, because Jesus alone was their Lord and King. This is of course heretical and Paul is compelled to point out to these Christians that before the second coming of Christ there will always be some kind of State, some kind of secular government and that Christians are not exonerated from subjection to some kind of political authority.<sup>798</sup>

Of note is the way the KD declares the "antinomians" or "enthusiasts" as heretical responses to the question of state authority. The point the KD tries to make, in opposition to the "antinomians" or "enthusiasts", is that a form of government or state will exist in one form or another before Christ's return, and this means that Christians will be subjected to some kind of political authority. This statement alone

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<sup>797</sup> Which, as we will see later in this chapter, Michael Neocosmos describes the embodiment of the "politics of the possible": "the idea that – in addition to an analysis of the existing, of the world as it is, it is also possible, indeed imperative, to develop an understanding of the possibility, of understanding the thought of a different future in this existing present – of the 'could be' in the 'what is'" (Michael Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible: Rethinking Militancy in Africa Today," *Interface*, vol. 1, no. 2 [2009], 266).

<sup>798</sup> "The Kairos Document," 10.

does not indicate much. Indeed one can look at this as fairly obvious. However, when viewed in light of the KD's argument for a Prophetic Theology, its section on a "challenge towards action" provides a new glimpse regarding the understanding of the state, which has significant ramifications regarding the nature and role of the church. In its argument, the KD recognizes that the church has an important role to play, but that this role should be shaped in the challenge to the morally illegitimate regime of the time – i.e., the apartheid government. The church's responsibility, it says, is to mobilize and prepare its members for a change in government. The church, in other words, has a moral obligation and responsibility to help put in place morally acceptable people and a legitimate government which would govern more justly. The church's role is therefore to challenge one regime and prepare for the next. In this way it accepts the inevitability of governing powers and positions itself in relation to such powers. It must, therefore, see itself as a power player. The KD accepts the overall premise that the government (or the state) is the principle entity responsible for the social politics of the day. The church's role is to ensure the legitimacy and morality of the government.

Such an understanding assumes several things. First, it assumes that the church itself either does not have a socio-political vision of its own (i.e., it possesses an apolitical view similar to that of Church Theology) or, if it does, is incapable of witnessing to such a vision without the help of the state (i.e., State Theology). Its vision, in other words, is connected to the ones who govern (i.e., the state). A distinction is assumed between that which is being struggled for (a just political practice) and the church's own capacity to enact such just practice. This is best demonstrated when the KD states:

Closely linked to this, is the lack in 'Church Theology' of an adequate understanding of *politics and political strategy* [emphasis original]. Changing the structures of a society is fundamentally a matter of politics. It requires a political strategy based upon a clear social or political analysis. The Church has to address itself to these strategies and to the analysis upon which they are based. It is into this political situation that the Church has to bring the gospel. *Not as an alternative solution to our problems as if the gospel provided us with a non-political solution to political problems. There is no specifically Christian solution.* There will be a Christian way of approaching the political solutions, a Christian spirit and motivation and attitude. But there is no way of bypassing politics and political strategies.<sup>799</sup> (Emphasis mine)

Even though the KD theologians want to bypass the apolitical nature of "Church

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<sup>799</sup> "The Kairos Document," 20.

Theology” by demonstrating that the church is necessarily involved in politics if it seeks the demise of apartheid, this statement highlights, ironically, the KD’s continued acceptance that there is a distinction between the church and politics in the sense that the church is not *itself* a political entity, that is demonstrating a particular kind of (alternative) politics to that of the state. The problem with “State Theology” and “Church Theology”, as far as the KD is concerned, is that the church is simply not supporting the right form of politics. But this assumes that it is not itself political. It only *becomes* “political” insofar as it engages in political analysis and challenges the oppressive political realities. It becomes apparent, therefore, that the “challenge to action” is thus a challenge, not for the church to embrace its own socio-political, or, perhaps, better put, theo-political vision, but for the church to help rid one form of government in order to bring in another.

To put this succinctly, the KD fails to recognize the church’s *own* political agenda. Besides standing in solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, and those who are suffering, it does not express the reasons *why* the church ought to concern itself with such a social and political agenda. It lacks, in other words, a more robust ecclesiology that could help understand and nourish such a vision and agenda that is indeed political. By asserting that the church must not have its own political agenda but must adopt the political agenda that would be supportive of a more just regime is it not reneging on its own calling to offer and to demonstrate *within itself* an alternative? The lack of such an ecclesiology makes it vulnerable to co-option, a temptation into which, as noted in the previous chapter, the church falls.

Second, the KD’s argument for a “Prophetic Theology” assumes a particular understanding regarding the nature of power, i.e., the ability to shape the way in which people relate in society,<sup>800</sup> as well as the nature and role of the church in this endeavor. The KD states:

The Church must avoid becoming a ‘Third Force,’ a force between the oppressor and the oppressed. The Church’s programmes and campaigns must not duplicate what the people’s organisations are already doing and, even more seriously, the Church must not confuse the issue by having programmes that run counter to the struggles of those political organisations that truly represent the grievances and demands of the people.<sup>801</sup>

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<sup>800</sup> A more critical look into the nature of “power” is offered at the end of this chapter. See pg. 255 ff.

<sup>801</sup> “The Kairos Document,” 32.

The KD suggests that the church has a role in society. But it (a) implores the church itself not to duplicate what “the people’s organizations” are already doing, and (b) makes a clear distinction between the church and “organizations of the people”, the latter being the political organizations which, it says, truly represent the people.

Such a view seems to assume the following: first, the church itself is not viewed or understood as a truly democratic voice of the people. Rather than being true representatives of the “grievances and demands of the people”, which the KD assumes the church is not, the decisions it makes are viewed, rather, as those of an institutional entity that implements the decisions made by others. It assumes the church does not embody the democratic practices to which the people, in the struggle against apartheid, aspired. This is a significant criticism regarding the assumed nature and function of the church. It is based on the assumption that the church not only *cannot* demonstrate an alternative form of political practice to the state but that it *should not* attempt to do so.

Second, there is the assumption that the *true* representatives of the people are the political organizations. The KD identifies clearly that the church is subservient to political organizations in the struggle – who “truly represent the grievances and demands of the people”. The church *qua* church, therefore, is separate and distinct from politics. The political is something separate and beyond the church. The church can talk about politics and can support particular political movements but is unable to demonstrate a different kind of politics itself. Like the proverbial eunuch it is the watchdog of those who can do it but is not able to do it itself.

In summary, chapter three highlighted the way in which the ICT and the drafting of the KD outlined an embodied emancipatory practice and thus an alternative political – and prophetic – witness. The KD emerged through the coming together of a people who together were organizing (a practice that already points to the creation of an alternative politics) and deciding to live and embody a different reality than that which the apartheid state prescribed. And yet the KD itself and the theological reflection it offers remains on a theological foundation that is less than prophetic. Indeed, its theological reflection falls back into the traps of the theologies it sought to criticize. Its depiction of a “Prophetic Theology” (a) fails to recognize the way in which the prophetic trajectory from which such a theology emerges and the counter-politics it offered in the face of an oppressive politics and its attempt to determine the way in which people ought to relate in the South African context. The

KD's depiction and call ultimately fails to understand the alternative politics prophetic theology offered as it already embodied the principles it desired, which also gave rise to an alternative ecclesiology. (b) This results in the KD suggesting a theological foundation that assumes the distinct roles between the state and the church, despite the larger counter-political, prophetic tradition, which, ironically, forms the basis of their criticism against State Theology and Church Theology. Even in the KD's attempt to offer a "Prophetic Theology" it accepts the state as the rightful handler of power and the entity responsible for the political, whereas the church, although portrayed as being able to offer suggestions in approaching (political) issues in a "Christian" way,<sup>802</sup> is ultimately called to offer its support to those who are the legitimate political actors.

The most damning evidence of these two points is the way in which those who many considered as "Prophetic theologians" entered into government and party politics after 1994.

Analyzing a "Prophetic Theologian": further exploring Albert Nolan's theology

Chapter three briefly reviewed the work and theology of Albert Nolan as he became one of the most significant theological voices for Liberation Theology and what became known as "Prophetic Theology" in the South African context during the heated 1980s. In chapter three I outlined Nolan's theology and the way he fed a prophetic theology through both word and deed. Indeed, one cannot talk about the church's struggle against the apartheid government along with Liberation or Prophetic Theology in the South African context without touching on Nolan's work and witness. His was a crucial voice and yet another example in the long prophetic tradition in the South African context. And yet, despite his personal witness, which can only be described as prophetic, and his ability to offer a convincing theology of liberation, he too falls into the same trap as the KD. This is especially apparent when he envisions the future, especially the relationship between the church and the state. Here we can find hints as to why "Prophetic Theology" as such did not have longevity after the demise of apartheid in 1994.

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<sup>802</sup> "The Kairos Document," 20.

Earlier it was noted how Nolan depicted “the struggle” and the way it almost offered an alternative ecclesiological experience as it formed a community willing to challenge the oppressive principalities and powers, seeking to embody a different reality based on equality, justice, and right relationships with others. As noted on pg. 89-90: “It provided an experience of community and a community in solidarity with one another (i.e., sharing in one another’s joys and sorrows); it provided a joint purpose and reason for being; it was a community that worshipped together; it provided an experience of an alternative understanding of power – power understood as ‘power with’ not ‘power over’; and it provided the necessary support in overcoming fear in order to act with one another with confidence and courage in already enacting the reality and the future dreamt about.” It provided an experience of the “already-but-not-yet” of God’s kingdom and the church that is to be a sign of it (pg. 90).

This raises the question as to why this theology has not carried forward into the post-apartheid era? What were some of the weaknesses in Nolan’s theology specifically and that of “Prophetic Theology” in general that prevented this prophetic witness after apartheid?

There are several elements that are worth exploring in Nolan’s argument found in *God in South Africa*. These can be summarized as: 1) the idealism of “the struggle” and the future it would bring about, while at the same time, ironically, being seen primarily as reactionary to the system it opposed; 2) the eschatological vision of Nolan and that of Prophetic Theology; and 3) the understanding of the church’s role and its relationship with the state.

1) As briefly noted in chapter three, Nolan’s depiction of “the struggle” explained some of the principles that drove it against the apartheid system. One can see how, for Nolan, “the struggle” can simply be summarized as the antithesis of apartheid.<sup>803</sup> Whereas apartheid sought to divide, “the struggle” united.<sup>804</sup> Whereas apartheid decided who does not belong, “the struggle” was based on creating a platform where everyone who participated in it belonged.<sup>805</sup> Whereas apartheid sought to rule over others, thereby assuming a hierarchical, top-down form of power (a “power over”), “the struggle” sought to embody a radically democratic form of

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<sup>803</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 157.

<sup>804</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 159.

<sup>805</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 158-61.

politics, thereby embracing a people's power – an egalitarian, non-hierarchical form of power that operates under the assumption that everyone has a say (a “power with”).<sup>806</sup> Whereas the majority of (mostly black) South Africans found apartheid to be disempowering, “the struggle” was empowering.<sup>807</sup>

Nolan's view regarding “the struggle”, however, is very optimistic and quite idealistic, especially regarding the future it would bring forth.<sup>808</sup> The fact that “the struggle” in South Africa possessed and was based on the above principles of inclusion, belonging, power with (rather than power over), and, most importantly for Nolan, democratization, leads him to make significant assertions as to the future of South Africa and South African politics. For example, he states:

The development of grassroots democracy in South Africa is an important sign of hope for the future. It is one of the ways in which our country has an advantage over other colonised countries especially in Africa. In many of these countries independence was gained after a brief struggle and frequently after an armed struggle that did not involve all the people, or, at least, did not involve all the people in grassroots organisations over many years. Popular organisation is now happening in some Latin American countries and in the Philippines, but in Africa as a whole there has not been the same contrast experience and the same long, democratically organised struggle. Thus when independence came most of the people were unconscientised, unpoliticised and unprepared for a fully participatory democracy... South Africa is different and will be different when liberation comes.<sup>809</sup>

And yet, 22 years after the official demise of the apartheid system, there is a growing concern that “active citizenship”, such that existed during the struggle against

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<sup>806</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 164-66.

<sup>807</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 163-66.

<sup>808</sup> Although the scope and focus of this dissertation does not allow for it, it would be very interesting to explore the way in which Nolan and his thought corresponds to Karl Mannheim's depiction of “Ideology” and “Utopia” (see Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia; an Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method [London, UK: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & co., 1936]). Judith Shklar summarizes Mannheim's concept of “ideology” as the typical thought orientation of those established or dominant classes that are inevitably deceived in their refusal to recognize the demands of the future. It is a “false consciousness” in that it is a set of interests and values that have no future possibility of actualization or historical realization (Judith N. Shklar, *Political Theory and Ideology*, Main Themes in European History [New York, Macmillan, 1966], 12). “Utopias”, on the other hand, are “the theories of those aspiring classes that are the bearers of an historical destiny and which in time will succeed in forming the effective nucleus of a culture” (Ibid., 12). The dilemma with Mannheim's depiction of “ideology” and “utopia”, however, is the way in which “utopias” must always be “out of power”, so to speak, because should such a group become dominant their ideas would become ideology. Shklar makes a similar observation. “The most serious deficiency of Mannheim's sociology of knowledge,” she argues, “was its failure to concern itself with the psychological mechanisms by which social conditions are translated by groups and individuals into doctrines” (Ibid., 13). And, as we will see in this chapter, this has indeed become the dilemma in the South African context.

<sup>809</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 150.



apartheid, is diminishing.<sup>810</sup> This we already noticed in the previous chapter where Khumalo bemoans the lack of participation among the people in the democratic process.<sup>811</sup> Indeed, this is the overall concern causing a renewed desire to reclaim a new form of prophetic theology (e.g., Kairos Southern Africa).

Nolan recognizes the way his earlier depictions of “the struggle” and the future it would bring about was, in a way, naïve and failed to take into account the way in which the lust for power along with greed would morph and corrupt even those who suffered for the sake and cause of “the struggle”.<sup>812</sup> He admits that those involved in the struggle did not pay sufficient attention to the personal transformation needed alongside the structural change.<sup>813</sup> And so, although the structure may have changed, some of the corrupted values inherent during apartheid have not.<sup>814</sup> This is what led Nolan to write *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom*.<sup>815</sup>

Although “the struggle” was in many ways an enactment of a prophetic way of being in the South African context of apartheid, led by an alternative form of politics (cf. chapter three), it became viewed – especially towards the latter part of 1980s – as a reaction to apartheid rule. “The struggle”, rather than described first-and-foremost as a principled expression of a particular form of politics, came to be understood in a reactionary way to the apartheid system. Thus, as noted in chapter four, with the demise of the apartheid system, Prophetic Theology, when viewed primarily as a reaction to apartheid, lost the entity against which it could react. Prophetic Theology, in other words, lost its *raison d’être* or as Nolan puts it, lost its common enemy.<sup>816</sup>

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<sup>810</sup> This is the basic concern, for example, in Simanga Kumalo’s article Kumalo, “‘The People Shall Govern’: Now They Have Only the Possibility to Vote.” See also Nico Koopman, “Citizenship in South Africa Today: Some Insights from Christian Ecclesiology,” *Missionalia* 43, no. 3 (2015); Clint Le Bruyns, “The Rebirth of Kairos Theology and Its Implications for Public Theology and Citizenship in South Africa,” *ibid.*; and Clint Le Bruyns, “The Church, Democracy and Responsible Citizenship,” *Religion & Theology* 19 (2012). We will also look more carefully into the works of Julian Brown and Michael Neocosmos later in this chapter as we explore the change in how “politics” is understood.

<sup>811</sup> cf. 184 ff.

<sup>812</sup> Nolan, interview by author. Mannheim describes this as part of the “false consciousness” inherent in “ideology” whereby those who come into power resort to antiquated moral axioms and interpretations all of which obscure the necessary adjustment and transformation of the person. Mannheim notes how “[a]ntiquated and inapplicable norms, modes of thought, and theories are likely to degenerate into ideologies whose function it is to conceal the actual meaning of conduct rather than to reveal it” (Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 85).

<sup>813</sup> Nolan, interview by author.

<sup>814</sup> Nolan, interview by author.

<sup>815</sup> Nolan, interview by author.

<sup>816</sup> Nolan, interview by author. Nolan goes on to describe how apartheid created the reason for a whole lot of collaboration. And, although this was good, it was, in a way, unfortunate because once that common enemy was removed, the reason to collaborate, and therefore the practice of collaboration

Two examples will suffice in demonstrating this point. The first can be seen in the way Nolan responds to the question of violence in the struggle. First, he rightly and astutely highlights the irony regarding the way violence is depicted. He comments: “Violence tends to mean any strong and forceful uprising of the people whether weapons are used or not.... To complicate matters still further the system will report any such event as an act of violence on the part of the youth who [throw stones] and as an act of peacekeeping on the part of the policy who killed some of the youth involved.”<sup>817</sup> Nolan, however, quickly suggests that “the fundamental question, of course, is not what counts as violence or as nonviolence; the fundamental question is who is the aggressor and who is the defender.”<sup>818</sup> He then proceeds to offer an argument based on the Just War Theory justifying some forms of violence (e.g., if it is in self-defense).

To understand the armed struggle we need to make a distinction between disciplined and undisciplined violence. The armed struggle is, or is supposed to be, an ordered and disciplined use of a measure of violence for the explicit purpose of putting an end to all violence. Moreover, the purpose of the armed struggle in South Africa is not to overthrow the present system by winning a military victory.... The purpose of the armed struggle is to add another form of pressure to the many forms of pressure that are being used to force the system to come to the negotiating table.<sup>819</sup>

Such logic, however, rests not on embodying a form of principled action. It is, rather, a reactionary form of action that depends on what or how “the aggressor” acts. Thus, whereas Nolan usually depicts “the struggle” as a principled form of action, which will cause one to act in such ways whether or not there is something to react against, in this instance Nolan’s depiction regarding violence demonstrates the way in which the embodied life of “the struggle” depends, ironically, on apartheid itself.

A second example can be found as Nolan wrestles with the question regarding the relationship between “the struggle” and revolution. Revolution, he notes, means “a radical change, a change in the basic structures of a society or an institution. As such

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itself, petered out. Ecumenism became difficult to sustain. And it was challenging to determine what the church should be prophetic about after the demise of apartheid (Nolan, interview by author).

<sup>817</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 169-70.

<sup>818</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 170.

<sup>819</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 170-71. Nolan here differentiates between a form of justified violence – a violence that is in self-defense against an aggressor – from that which is “chaotic” and “undisciplined”. He comments how “chaotic” and “undisciplined” violence does not accord with the spirit of the struggle. “One can understand why and how it happens, but, apart from any ethical considerations, I cannot see how it really promotes the struggle and *I cannot find God in it*” (Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 171). Is Nolan suggesting that God can be found in “disciplined” violence?

it must be clearly distinguished from the word ‘reform’ ....”<sup>820</sup> Here Nolan is challenging the apartheid government’s often-touted plan to “reform” the system. He is arguing that when a system such as apartheid is corrupt in-and-of-itself, as it is built on the foundation of the interests of a minority of the people, no manner of reform will be sufficient. During such times, he would argue, it is good and right to talk about “revolution” – a radical change in the structures of society. This is no different, he notes, than what Jesus himself sought to do.<sup>821</sup>

However, once again we find Nolan’s depiction, especially pertaining to the question of violence, as primarily a reactive response. As he continues to explain and justify his use of the term “revolution”, he suggests “[a] revolutionary change does not necessarily involve violence. Much depends upon whether the system resists this kind of change with violence or not.”<sup>822</sup> The use of violence, in other words, depends on the form of response from the one against whom one is struggling – in this case the apartheid government and system. Put plainly, the practices of “the struggle”, in Nolan’s depiction, are determined not by principled forms of actions but by those whom one is opposing or challenging. This fails to match with his earlier comments. Whereas earlier we saw how “the struggle” sought to embody those characteristics that it desired for the future (i.e., participation, organization, democracy, etc.), here we find a move away from such principled action towards a more reactionary course of action.

2) The above point raises questions regarding the eschatological vision of Prophetic Theology. Chapter three highlighted Nolan’s concern in the way salvation and liberation are often portrayed as separate and different within the Christian faith. Indeed, the first two chapters (State Theology and Church Theology respectively) demonstrated this separation, to which Prophetic Theology responded and offered an alternative. Rather than following the same trajectory that understood salvation and liberation – or religion and politics – separately, Nolan argues that, when God or the transcendent is introduced into the picture, these two become consistent and compatible elements of the Gospel’s vision.<sup>823</sup> Thus, as noted earlier, a direct

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<sup>820</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 173.

<sup>821</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 173.

<sup>822</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 173.

<sup>823</sup> Cf. pg. 147-48 ff.

connection is drawn between transcendence and eschatology – that which Nolan describes as an “inviting horizon”.<sup>824</sup>

Although Nolan defines “horizon” as that which is not fixed as it “moves along with us and invites us to press further ahead,”<sup>825</sup> he does attach the current horizon – found during apartheid South Africa in the 1980s – as the liberation of South Africa from apartheid. He says, “But *at this moment* our horizon, our *eschaton*, our salvation, is the liberation of South Africa from this particular system of slavery and sin.”<sup>826</sup> This allows liberation to be an experience of God’s salvific grace.

Although Nolan rightly challenges the often separated notions of liberation and salvation, we can, thanks to hindsight, see how the “horizon” of liberation has not, in fact, carried forward. The implication of what he is saying, separated from the nuance of the context in which he was articulating it, becomes an ideal, goal, and end – “...our *eschaton*, our salvation, is the liberation of South Africa...”<sup>827</sup> Thus, in the political theology after 1994 we can see how the aims, purposes, and even the practices of liberation seemed not to be needed once the *eschaton* finally arrived.

In this way, Nolan’s theology and that of Liberation Theology in general, equate a particular emancipatory struggle with the broader, ongoing struggle for the Kingdom of God. By equating the *eschaton* with the liberation from apartheid, the theological rationale becomes null-and-void once the particular hurdle is overcome. No longer is there need for an ongoing struggle that seeks, moves towards, and embodies God’s Kingdom, despite the different forms and particular political regimes that may exist.

Nolan’s theology, and much of Prophetic or Liberation theology in the South African context in general, falls victim to the reduction of its eschatological vision. John Howard Yoder, in 1973, already raised caution about this tendency as he responded to certain theologies of liberation emerging during that time:

The slogan “Exodus before Sinai” presupposes that “liberation” is a single and final event; that is the claim that justifies treating its violence as a legitimate ethical exception. Yet Sinai was to become the place of a new bondage. Exodus leads not to the promised land but to the desert, and in that desert Sinai is the place of a new enslavement motivated partly by loyalty to the values of Egypt.

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<sup>824</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 188.

<sup>825</sup> A phrase that Nolan adopts from Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope; on the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, 1st U.S. ed. (New York,: Harper & Row, 1967).

<sup>826</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 189.

<sup>827</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 189.

What happened at Sinai was thus first the fall of Israel, unwilling despite the liberation just experienced to be patient in awaiting the Word of God from the mountain, preferring under Aaron's leading to take things into their own hands.<sup>828</sup>

A reduced eschatological perspective fails to see – or prepare for – the way of life that a community that pursues true liberation must embody even when a particular king, regime, or political system is overcome. And this, unfortunately, is the pit Prophetic Theology in the South African context has fallen into.

3) This brings us to the third element: Nolan's ecclesiological perspective and what the church's role and relationship is vis-à-vis the state. As noted above, Nolan highlighted the way in which "the struggle" provided an alternative ecclesiological experience. But he did not equate this experience with the church. How, then, was the church understood? And, for Nolan, what *was* its role?

We must remember the context in which Nolan was writing. The church, during apartheid was divided. There were some within the church that were actively supporting apartheid; others within were trying to stay out of the conflict, hoping to remain neutral; and others who were actively opposing apartheid and its rule. And so, if we were to talk about "the church", which church would we be talking about?

Nolan's primary purpose in his *God in South Africa* was to dig deeper into the fundamental building blocks of Christianity, i.e., unpacking the meaning of "Gospel", "sin", and "salvation", thereby hoping to demonstrate that the church ought to participate in "the struggle" against oppression and injustice – that is against the system of apartheid and its regime. Ultimately Nolan's attempt was to offer a different understanding of the Christian message – the "Gospel" – that would redefine the way in which "Gospel" was (and is) typically understood. "What we are talking about, then, is a gospel that emerges from below, from the practice of faith and the instinct of faith of those who are oppressed."<sup>829</sup>

But this is not the way people have experienced the church. The church, argues Nolan, is also a site of struggle. "Everyone agrees that the Church is supposed to preach the gospel but everything depends upon which gospel you are talking about."<sup>830</sup> The church as a whole, he argues, hesitates to take action or to get involved in the struggle because "...it wants to preserve its denominational *unity* at all

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<sup>828</sup> John Howard Yoder, "Exodus and Exile: The Two Face of Liberation," *Cross Currents*, Fall (1973): 304.

<sup>829</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 211.

<sup>830</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 210.

costs.”<sup>831</sup> And yet, Nolan argues that the church’s first priority is not unity, especially at the cost of justice, but to preach the gospel – the gospel that has as its focus the liberation of those who are oppressed and suffering – even at the cost of unity.<sup>832</sup>

Ultimately, Nolan’s desire is for the church – people who are Christians – to stand up and participate in the struggle for justice. And yet, even as Nolan encourages such a perspective, he distinguishes between the church as people and the church as institution, as well as between the church and politics.<sup>833</sup>

We have seen that its role as an institution is to preach the gospel, to bring God into the picture. The picture is political, and bringing God into it has far-reaching political consequences, but that does not make the Church (as an institution) into a political organization... The role of a political organisation or party (one that is opposed to the system) is to restructure the society by political means, that is to say, by mobilising and organising to put political pressure on the system, by taking part in negotiations, by contesting an election, by canvassing for votes and then by participating in the government of the country.<sup>834</sup>

Nolan recognizes that the gospel, and bringing God into the picture, has political consequences. And yet he wants to make it clear that this does not mean the church is therefore a political organization. Part of the reason for this is the pressure the church – or those who represented the church or churches, such as the SACC – was experiencing in becoming a political organization that could potentially fill the void of the absence of other political organizations that were banned (e.g., the African National Congress, the Pan Africanist Congress, etc.). But Nolan accepted particular roles regarding political organizations as well as of the church. For example, it is the responsibility of political organizations to restructure society, mobilize and organize political pressure on the system (of apartheid), as well as to negotiate, contest elections, canvass for votes, and participate in the government. The role of the church, on the other hand, is depicted differently:

The Church becomes involved in running hospitals, schools and other social services only when the State is neglecting its social duties or is simply unable to do these things alone. Similarly, actions and campaigns for justice are not the specific task of the Church. These are the things that ought to be done by political organisations, but in times of crisis the Church might need to witness to what it believes to be right by

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<sup>831</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 214.

<sup>832</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 215.

<sup>833</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 216.

<sup>834</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 216-17.

taking some action. All of this is done by the Church, in certain circumstances, in order to preach the gospel by example.<sup>835</sup>

Although Nolan questions the separation between the religious and the political, or the separation between salvation and liberation, it is precisely in his understanding of the church and its relation to the state and/or politics that he too, unfortunately, falls into the trap that he wanted to avoid. There are several ways in which this happens.

First, Nolan states that the social functions in society are the primary duties and responsibilities of the state. Only when the state fails to satisfy its social duties, or is simply unable to do these things alone, should the church assist. In meeting the social needs of society, the church only steps in either to work in partnership with the state or do what the state should do but cannot or does not.

The witness of the Church is its activity of practicing what it preaches. On the one hand, this is done by gathering together a community of believers that can be an example, a sign or sacrament of the salvation we are hoping for. On the other hand, the Church practices what it preaches by actions or campaigns and by social services such as feeding the hungry or running hospitals and schools. *In themselves these actions, campaigns and social services are not the specific task of the Church* (emphasis added).<sup>836</sup>

One is led to assume that the concern for the social is primarily the role of the state and not of the church. The church steps in “only when the State is neglecting its social duties or is simply unable to do these things alone.”<sup>837</sup>

Second, Nolan’s comment demonstrates the way in which he understands the role of the church. He says “actions and campaigns for justice are not the specific task of the Church. These are the things that ought to be done by political organisations.” This line of thought is very similar to Reinhold Niebuhr’s comment: “If we contemplate the conflict between religious and political morality it may be well to recall that the religious ideal in its purest form has nothing to do with the problem of social justice.”<sup>838</sup> Although it contradicts Nolan’s argument up to this point, we see here a distinction made between the role and being of the church as separate or distinct from that which is deemed to be “political”. In fact, whereas Nolan

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<sup>835</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 210.

<sup>836</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 209-10.

<sup>837</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 210.

<sup>838</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 263.

consistently fights against this temptation, his ecclesiological perspective relinquishes the “political” and relegates the church into being apolitical. The responsibility of being “political” is placed onto the state without adequately recognizing the church’s own political agenda in the world.

Third, Nolan’s depiction that only “in times of crisis the Church might need to witness to what it believes to be right by taking some action” suggests that it is possible to be the church without taking action. Once again Nolan’s ecclesiological perspective reflects what he wanted to avoid, namely, the understanding that the church can be the church and yet be inactive.<sup>839</sup>

At the most basic level, Nolan simply wants to argue that the church should not be another political party upon the inauguration of democracy. He wants to distinguish between the role of a political organization or party and the church. He argues:

Problems arise when the Church as an institution begins to offer its own solutions to political problems. To formulate one’s own political policies and to mobilise people around them: this is to play the role of a political organisation. The role of the Church is to comment on political policies, to name the sin and the salvation, to criticise what is wrong, to praise what is right, to pray for salvation, to praise God for what is good, to support, to protest and even to propose new ways of acting, but not to formulate political or economic policies.<sup>840</sup>

Unfortunately, however, Nolan’s understanding of politics and the relationship between the church and politics – or rather the political nature of the church – is too one-dimensional. This, as the previous chapter already demonstrated, seems to have been a common challenge within much of “Prophetic Theology” in general. This has become evident as “Prophetic Theology” became muted, at best, in the South African theological scene after the demise of apartheid when many of those considered to be “Prophetic theologians” entered into government and party politics after 1994.

Nolan is correct in arguing that the church’s call is not to become a political party and enter “party politics” in an attempt to govern the country in the same way

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<sup>839</sup> One could argue that this is consistent with a *status confessionis* ecclesiological understanding. A *status confessionis* would understand that there are certain times when the church must enter into a confessional state and not participate in a particular reality that it finds to be contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Such a perspective, however, makes possible a premise that suggests it is possible for the church to *not* be a confessional entity. It assumes, in other words, that the church can be a non-confessional church when there is no time of crisis, i.e., when a time of *status confessionis* would not be required.

<sup>840</sup> Nolan, *God in South Africa*, 217.



other political parties and organizations do. What is concerning, however, is the reduced way in which “politics” is understood and defined. It fails to recognize and does not name the ways in which the church *is* political as it is called to embody the politics particular to it, namely the politics of Jesus’ understanding of the presence of the Kingdom of God. This form of politics is vastly different from other political manifestations that are all too familiar in the political landscape of nation-state politics or the politics of empire. If this is not better understood or defined, the church is simply, once again, relegated to be the handmaiden of the nation-state or empire or a body that is apolitical which does not take the social implications of the Christian faith seriously.

One cannot overstate Albert Nolan’s contribution to South Africa’s emancipatory quest nor his own personal prophetic witness in the pursuit of justice and liberation alongside those who were suffering and oppressed in South Africa. He was indeed a shining witness of what it meant to be prophetic. There are, however, several underlying elements in his thinking that perhaps prevented “Prophetic Theology” as such to make the transition into the post-apartheid context. The first was the idealism of how “the struggle” was viewed and the assumption that its characteristics (e.g., participation, organization, democratic practices, etc.) would simply carry on should “the struggle” succeed in dismantling the apartheid system. Nolan did not anticipate sufficiently how the power to rule, and the accompanying greed, would morph and corrupt even those who had suffered for the cause of “the struggle”. Part of the dilemma was the way in which “the struggle” and its practices were understood as reactionary to the apartheid system.

The second impediment is the narrow eschatological vision that “the struggle” embraced. The biblical/theological perspective of God’s desired liberation was too closely connected to a particular political struggle – the liberation against apartheid. Such a perspective did not consider the ongoing challenge – the ongoing struggle – that requires our continual participation until God’s kingdom come.

The third impediment is the lack of ecclesiological analysis that highlights the church’s own political being and character. Because of this weak ecclesiology, the relationship of the church to the state remains similar to that which Nolan wanted to avoid, namely, the way in which the church remains apolitical in the emancipatory struggle towards justice. The result being that, despite the desire to understand “power” differently – i.e., that power rests in the hands of the people, as represented

through the struggle cry “Amandla – Awethu” – the perception that the state is the one who carries and wields true power remains entrenched. Ultimately, this fails to embrace and enact the truly different form of power that was desired and enacted during the struggle against apartheid.

### *Interrogating post-apartheid political theology*

The characteristics of a particular form of “apolitical” theology quickly became apparent as South Africa transitioned from apartheid into its post-apartheid, democratic dispensation. The previous chapter highlighted the way in which “prophetic” or liberation theological discourse, as it was considered to be too oppositional for the emerging political dispensation, was abandoned for a theology of reconstruction. This theological discourse was more collaborative with the new democratically elected state and thus more constructive in the nation-building project. This shift demonstrates the traits that were already present in Nolan’s theology in the latter 1980s. It made apparent the way in which “the struggle” and its theological reflection became primarily a response to apartheid. It also highlighted the reduced eschatological vision in which the *eschaton* was equated with the demise of apartheid. The result was that “Prophetic Theology” as such evaporated as South Africa transitioned into its new democratic dispensation.

The most damning evidence of the disappearance of Prophetic Theology can be seen in the way several “prophetic theologians” entered the corridors of the state after 1994. Among them were Frank Chikane, Allan Boesak, and Smangiliso Mkatshwa. The focus, in hindsight, shifted away from the way in which Prophetic Theology emerged as an alternative, communally embodied emancipatory practice that gave rise to an alternative form of politics in the face of the oppressive and unjust political regime towards a more straightforward understanding of regime change – removing an illegitimate state in favour of another; one that is hopefully more benevolent and just. Such a shift also changed the way in which people thought the church ought to relate to the new government and state.

The previous chapter looked briefly at several theologians and theological developments in the new, post-apartheid South Africa. At this point it is worth

interrogating further such developments in order to better understand a) the current theological climate, as well as b) the loss of the church's prophetic voice in South Africa's post-apartheid context.

In analyzing the arguments and theologies of Simanga Kumalo, Anthony Egan, and Kairos Southern Africa, we can identify several common assumptions. The first pertains to the role of the state. All three portray the state as being the primary and rightful bearer of responsibility for the structuring and ordering of society. The state is portrayed as responsible to determine the way in which people within its border should relate to one another – i.e., the state and its government are the key political entities.

Second, they all assume that the church is called to engage with the state, its politics, and the power it wields. Kumalo describes this as assisting or partnering with the state to ensure “good governance”.<sup>841</sup> Egan suggests that the church ought to engage and assist the government in issues of governance, helping to shape and influence government policy and legislature.<sup>842</sup> Kairos SA offers a pastoral word to South Africa's ruling party, challenging it to rule in the interests of the people rather than out of individual self-interest.<sup>843</sup> Thus, each, in an attempt to maintain political relevance, offers ways in which the church ought to engage the state and/or the government. They all, however, operate from an already assumed distinction between that which is “political” (i.e., the being, function, and duty of the state) from that which is understood as separate from or outside of the political realm. The church, and civil society in general, are understood to be part of the latter.

Third, these assumptions relegate the church to an apolitical entity because its own political character is not recognized. Thus, the church may be satisfied with its apolitical identity, which has been the Pentecostal and Charismatic tendency, or, the church's main tactic is to partner (Kumalo), be in close proximity with (Egan), or assume a chaplaincy function to the governing party (Kairos SA) so as to influence the government, its policies, and its practices. The hope being that such tactics could thus provide a “moral compass” in the way the government rules. The common assumption, however, is that the state is the political entity whose role and function is to rule its prescribed geographic boundary, whereas the church is seen as separate and

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<sup>841</sup> Kumalo, "The People Shall Govern!: Now They Have Only the Possibility to Vote," 13.

<sup>842</sup> Egan, "Governance Beyond Rhetoric," 100.

<sup>843</sup> Kairos Southern Africa, "A Word to the ANC, in These Times," 10.

apart from such a political task. From a KD perspective, these are characteristics of either Church Theology (seeking to be apolitical) or State Theology (walking hand-in-glove with the state). Either way, it fails to offer a Prophetic Theology.

A fourth assumption is that the church ought to help determine the social ordering of the state. Although each would undoubtedly state their interest in being sensitive to other faith – or no faith – traditions, their theology and related ecclesiological functions, as related to and seeking to influence the state, operate under the assumption that Christian morality should be enforced throughout the nation-state.<sup>844</sup> This is most apparent in Egan’s articulation. He overtly suggests ways in which Christian morality and ethics ought to be enforced through the state and its laws and governance practices. But this is also common in both Kumalo and Kairos SA. Their desire to influence the state with Christian based morality and ethics suggests an attempt to have such morality enforced throughout the nation-state. This raises the question whether the ways of Jesus can, in fact, be forced or whether a Christ-centred life is first-and-foremost a result of choice and confessing Jesus Christ as Lord – a politically charged declaration to be sure.

Lastly, there is a common assumption regarding the concept and location of power. The prophetic theological movement in its historical embodiment (as noted in chapter three) enacted an alternative understanding of power. Proponents began to embody the changes they believed were needed, whether or not they were in positions of leadership, influence, or authority. The post-apartheid theologies we looked at, on the other hand, assume that change must come through those “in power”. This is the difference between “power from below” and “power from above”. Post-apartheid theologies have begun to operate according to a “power from above” paradigm as they seek ways of determining society. Their primary motivation is to be effective and influential in ordering society and affecting change therein. The church, according to such a view, ought to embrace as virtuous the influence it has exerted on others in determining and ensuring a “Christian social order”.

These traits have also largely been present within Public Theology, albeit in a more nuanced way, primarily because Public Theology offers a broader perspective in

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<sup>844</sup> Steve de Gruchy also makes this observation. He describes it as a concern for keeping society “Christian”. He notes how this leads churches, in their attempts to be politically influential, to be so through conversion – converting the state leadership toward Christianity, thus ensuring a morally “Christian” society. See John W. De Gruchy and Steve De Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, Twenty-fifth anniversary ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 251.

defining what is “public”. Therefore, in attempting to do theology in public – i.e., in the public sphere comprising political, economic, and civil society – there is a broader perspective in how societal change comes about. And yet, although it offers a broader perspective, Public Theology maintains some of the basic assumptions noted above.

First, Public Theology maintains a distinction regarding that which is deemed political. Although there are other aspects involved in the public sphere, there is a clear understanding that “politics” or “the political” refers to the state and its government, which is a distinct part of the public sphere. Thus although it broadens the perspective of societal change by incorporating other elements within the public sphere the notion of “politics” (what is deemed to be “political”) is reserved for the government and the state.

Second, the main focus of Public Theology focuses on how the church and/or Christian theology can influence “the public”, recognizing the different elements that create the public space as well as the liberal, democratic assumptions from which it operates. The challenge for Public Theology in South Africa, as De Villiers notes, is the church’s loss of influence and social status within South Africa’s new, secular, liberal, democratic political dispensation.<sup>845</sup> Thus, Public Theology has become a way in which the church can continue to participate in the discussion regarding the common good, whilst seeking to influence its direction.

Third, Public Theology desires to influence society and “the public” from the center of public life where the perception of power and influence is most concentrated. Thus Maluleke’s concern noted in the previous chapter that theology arises in the perceived central hubs of power thus failing to take seriously the experiences, lives, and pain that exist in the margins of society.<sup>846</sup>

Fourth, although Public Theology operates for the most part within liberal, democratic society thus recognizing the plethora of influences and voices within, its intent remains to influence society by first and foremost influencing those in power. Thus the assumption remains that Christian conviction and ethics can be ordered and enforced through law rather than being something that emerges voluntarily and confessionally.

These are significant shifts in the way theology is understood in the post-apartheid South African context. Prophetic Theology emerged as a tangible

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<sup>845</sup> Cf. pg. 196 ff.

<sup>846</sup> Cf. pg. 200.

expression that a community embodied in the ways of relating to one another – i.e., its politics – within its particular social order. In this way Prophetic Theology was an embodiment of a particular politics in the face of another social construct. After 1994, although there were already some traces in the late 1980s, the key emphasis of the theology that emerged no longer focused on how a community can embody its particular principled way of being in the world. Instead its focus became how a government can best rule and govern and the way the church can assist in that endeavor. Ultimately this highlights a shift in the way politics itself is understood.

### *Shift in the way 'Politics' is understood*

It has become clear that one of the most significant shifts that has occurred in the transition from the apartheid to post-apartheid context is how “politics” as such is understood. Whereas those involved in the struggle against apartheid and its politics of oppression, injustice, and domination, saw themselves as actively participating in politics even when they were not part of the state machinery, “politics” after apartheid came to be understood as the activity of the state and its governing authorities. This work has demonstrated how Prophetic Theology, as a theological movement, has a long history of challenging the status quo in society by embodying an alternative political witness – an alternative way in which people could and did relate to one another in society. Such a theology overtly challenged the principalities and powers and their rule and proved to be subversive and dangerous precisely because it offered and embodied an alternative political reality and vision.

The demise of apartheid brought with it a shift in theological expression. Prophetic Theology was portrayed and understood as being too oppositional and adversarial. Thus a theology that focused more on reconstruction and nation-building arose. What has seemingly gone unnoticed is the way in which this shift embraced and began to operate according to a different definition regarding “politics”.

Anna Selmeczi, a post-doctorate fellow at Fort Hare University, offers a very interesting and helpful glance at how such a shift in understanding came to be. In an article entitled “Haunted by the Rebellion of the Poor: Civil Society and the Racialized Problem of the (Non-)economic subject”, Selmeczi highlights the way in

which academic and policy discourse, already in the latter 1980s, began to suggest a need to move away from the then active civil organizations (“civics”) and their modes of participation and practice to a more commonly held (neo)liberal view regarding the need for a civil society. Selmeczi notes how there were two particular influences suggesting the necessity of such a shift: 1) questions pertaining to future governability of the country after the demise of apartheid and its rule; and 2) the recognition within the economic sector (i.e., capital) in particular that apartheid was no longer a vehicle that would best serve their purposes in the pursuit of profit.

Regarding the former – the question of South Africa’s ungovernability – Selmeczi demonstrates the way in which an alternative understanding of politics was deemed necessary from the current mode which was depicted as too oppositional. She notes, for example, how Sholto Cross, a member of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and active resistor to apartheid, began to suggest changes as South Africa’s move towards a democratic, liberal (or neo-liberal) political dispensation was increasingly viewed as inevitable.

As opposed to social and religious movements, Cross argues, the civic organizations (“the civics,” as they are commonly referred to) that were at the center of massive campaigns of popular resistance in the mid- to late 1980s, hinder rather than help delivering development, as due to their “predominant concern with the political,” they fail to grasp the subtle dynamics operating in poor segments of the society. Although they might “now offer their services as development intermediaries,” the civics are not suitable for instilling “a common sense of nationality, and internalized sense of civic order.”<sup>847</sup>

As such, Selmeczi highlights the way in which communities, involved in what was then called “civics”, embraced and embodied a perceived need to reform their practices based on an active, democratic participatory politics.<sup>848</sup> She demonstrates how Mzwanele Mayekiso, one of the civic movement’s organizing officers in Alexandria (one of Johannesburg townships), among others,<sup>849</sup> grappled with what became the pressing question regarding the apparent upcoming political transition – “how to ‘reconcile the history of popular politics and mass mobilization with the

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<sup>847</sup> Anna Selmeczi, “Haunted by the Rebellion of the Poor: Civil Society and the Racialized Problem of the (Non-)Economic Subject,” *Foucault Studies* 20, no. December (2015): 55. Here Selmeczi is quoting Mzwanele Mayekiso, “Institutions that Themselves Need to be Watched Over,” *Urban Forum*, vol. 4, no. 1 (March 1, 1993), 35.

<sup>848</sup> Selmeczi, “Haunted by the Rebellion of the Poor,” 58.

<sup>849</sup> Whom Selmeczi describes as scholarly and political elites.

institutions of liberal democracy.”<sup>850</sup> In other words, there was a perceived need to move past a politics based on mass mobilization, or what others describe as active citizenship,<sup>851</sup> to one based on representational institutions common within liberal democracies.

The second influence was the recognition from the business sector that apartheid and its rule was no longer a vehicle able to best serve their purposes and offer the desired profits. “So intensive and extensive was popular opposition at the time, that ‘[e]ven capital has begun to doubt that apartheid is the best guarantor of its profits’ – and it is exactly at this juncture that, we should notice, the rapid ascension of the idea of reform as political transition had begun.”<sup>852</sup> Selmeczi notes how this recognition began to influence the way in which the liberation movement against apartheid was described. It became increasingly characterized as a movement that embodied the concept of ungovernability, which was perceived and reduced to local and destructive protest. Thus, in order to move towards a more profitable future, reform would be required; a move towards the prospect of “governability”. Thus, rather than encouraging a strategy of “ungovernability”, which was perceived to be outside that deemed to be “political”, a strategy was adopted which could be more helpful for the birth of a new nation. The astute reader will already recognize the way in which theologies based on reconstruction and nation-building embraced the way in which this narrative is framed – liberation (or prophetic) theology being too antagonistic and confrontational thus requiring a theology focused on reconstruction and nation-building, as South Africa entered into its new political dispensation.

Such a move, however, failed to recognize the politics that was already practiced and embodied within communities, even those communities that seemed to be or was portrayed as “ungovernable”. In making reference to Murphy Morobe, the Acting Publicity Secretary for the United Democratic Front (UDF), and a speech he made in 1987, which had to be delivered on his behalf as he was detained at the time

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<sup>850</sup> Selmeczi, “Haunted by the Rebellion of the Poor,” 56. Here Selmeczi is quoting Mzwanele Mayekiso’s, *Township Politics: Civic Struggles for a New South Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1996), 86 and 96.

<sup>851</sup> See, for example, Michael Neocosmos, “Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible: Rethinking Militancy in Africa Today,” *Interface*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2009), as well as Julian Brown, *South Africa’s Insurgent Citizens: On Dissent and the Possibility of Politics* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana Media [Pty] Ltd, 2015).

<sup>852</sup> Selmeczi, “Haunted by the Rebellion of the Poor,” 59.



(already highlighting the engaged politics from which his response arises), Selmeczi notes:

In his elaboration of what it means that the UDF is engaged in a national democratic struggle, the larger part of the text focuses on the democratic element, arguing that, although such a clear distinction can hardly be made, democracy is both the aim and the means of the struggle. Thus, while the ultimate goal of the movement is a democratic South Africa – ‘This can be summed up in the principal slogan of the Freedom Charter: “The People Shall Govern”’ – Morobe argues that indeed democracy is already being practiced through and within the existing organizations of resistance. Accordingly, the prospect of parliamentary models that were being put forward at the time (generally without considering “existing organizations, practices and traditions of political struggle in this country”) offered a much narrower idea of democracy in their view. For the UDF, democracy meant mass participation; the opportunity for people to gain control “over every aspect of [their] lives.” In line, then, with the original idea of ungovernability as “a political weapon in the hands of people with no access to political power,” the significance of the organs of people’s power that had emerged by the mid-1980s was their potential to begin and remedy decades (and centuries) of exploitation and oppression through allowing everyone to actively shape their lives. For the UDF, parliamentary democracy in itself could not guarantee the continuation of that process.

If self-government (in the Freedom Charter’s sense) had already been at work in, among others, street committees, student representative councils and parent-teacher-student associations contemporaneously with or, in fact, through, the defiant campaign of ungovernability, then the evolutionary narrative progressing from protest to transition does not hold.<sup>853</sup>

The suggested move to what Selmeczi describes as development discourse, which corresponds to theologies of reconstruction and nation-building noted in chapter four, fails to recognize the politics already embodied by communities in response to apartheid from which Prophetic Theology arose. It fails to recognize the way in which communities were already attempting to live according to the ideals and principles they desired in the face of another political system that sought to maintain its rule of oppression over them. We can therefore, with Selmeczi’s help, begin to see the problem regarding the understanding that Liberation (or Prophetic) Theology was simply oppositional in nature, which has been the common depiction of it by those who have promoted a theology of reconstruction and nation-building.

Michael Neocosmos<sup>854</sup> also helps to understand the shift regarding the way “politics” is understood. Neocosmos describes this shift as one that moves from “active citizenship” to that of “civil society”. He argues that within the African context in general, and the South African context in particular, there has been little attention that critically examines the neo-liberal politics that necessarily accompanies

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<sup>853</sup> Selmeczi, “Haunted by the Rebellion of the Poor,” 59-60.

<sup>854</sup> Michael Neocosmos is a professor at Rhodes University, South Africa.

the economics of neo-liberalism.<sup>855</sup> He notes the irony whereby “[l]iberal conceptions of ‘human rights’, political parties, civil society, the equating of politics with the state, the unproblematic notion of ‘the rule of law’ and especially formalistic political practices have regularly been taken over uncritically in left-radical discourse, which is simultaneously attempting to develop alternatives to economic neo-liberalism.”<sup>856</sup> He raises the concern in the way in which the politics that were alive during the struggle for national liberation in South Africa have collapsed into state politics, thus losing its emancipatory content.<sup>857</sup> Thus, his desire, like that which has already been noted as a cornerstone of Prophetic Theology, is to explore the “politics of the possible”: “the idea that – in addition to an analysis of the existing, of the world as it is, it is also possible, indeed imperative, to develop an understanding of the possibility, of understanding the thought of a different future in this existing present – of the ‘could be’ in the ‘what is’.”<sup>858</sup>

Neocosmos suggests that in the 1980s struggle for national liberation there existed what he describes as popular politics which offered an example of an alternative politics in the midst of apartheid society as well as that of the National Liberation Struggle (NLS).<sup>859</sup> Neocosmos builds on Alan Badiou’s understanding of politics as an event<sup>860</sup> whereby that which is considered as “impossible” and not conceivable from within the knowledges of a given situation arises to offer an alternative.<sup>861</sup> Neocosmos, for example, notes how “[a]n emancipatory politics or a truly popular-democratic politics is difficult if not impossible to conceive from within the parameters of liberalism, a politics of saving and helping the ethnically oppressed is inconceivable within a politics of ethnic genocide and so on. The event is

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<sup>855</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 265.

<sup>856</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 265-66.

<sup>857</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 266. This is similar to John Holloway’s criticism in the way “revolution” (changing and creating a different type of society) becomes hijacked through the allure of state power. See John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power*, New ed. (London ; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005), 20-21.

<sup>858</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 266.

<sup>859</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 294. The NLS refers to liberation movements that participated in armed struggle and, in the South African struggle, were directed from leaders in exile and therefore outside of South Africa. Neocosmos differentiates the character of the NLS from other movements such as the United Democratic Front which, as opposed to the NLS and its more hierarchically determined *modus operandi*, operated according to democratic principles of participation and decision-making.

<sup>860</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London; New York: Verso, 2001), 67.

<sup>861</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 283.

something which points to alternatives to what is, to the possibility of something different.”<sup>862</sup> His point being that such an alternative – a stepping outside of – took place in the 1980s.<sup>863</sup> This study builds on Neocosmos’ insights, arguing that Prophetic Theology has been and has offered such an alternative throughout South Africa’s history.

Neocosmos argues that whereas the National Struggle for Liberation (NSL) ostensibly sought emancipation from imperial and colonial structures, its mode of struggle hinged on the construction of a nation, “thus unavoidably referring politics to an external (social) invariant such as nation, state and/or class.”<sup>864</sup> This, as has already been noted, is the tension within the work of Albert Nolan. Neocosmos, on the other hand, suggests that an alternative mode of politics arose, largely out of the urban popular masses of the oppressed black population, whereby an independent role in the politics of transformation managed to provide an inventively different content to that of the NSL mode of politics.<sup>865</sup>

In looking more closely at the example of the UDF, Neocosmos notes how, rather than adhering to a particular party line, organizations that together formed the UDF as a loose confederation of local political affiliates gathered around and adhered to common principles.<sup>866</sup> He argues that

... the mass movement in the 1980s substituted for a while a notion of “people’s power”. One of the main characteristics of this event which constituted a break from previous modes of resistance politics is that arguably, for the first time, nationalist/nationwide resistance did not take the form of a mirror image of colonial/apartheid oppression; that mirror image already existed in the politics of the exiled ANC. Rather, that resistance and the culture which emanated from it, acquired its inspiration directly from the struggles of people in their daily lives for political control over their social-economic environment, thus providing the “enabling environment” for the unleashing of popular political initiatives and inventiveness.<sup>867</sup>

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<sup>862</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 283.

<sup>863</sup> See, for example, his discussion regarding the United Democratic Front (UDF) and its affiliates, especially from 1984-1986, in contrast to the National Liberation Struggle (NLS) mode of politics as the political modes of those in exile, which Neocosmos argues drew more on Marxist discourse (Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 294-95).

<sup>864</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 296.

<sup>865</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 299-300.

<sup>866</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 300.

<sup>867</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 300. Although Neocosmos suggests this mode of politics only arose in the 1980s I suggest that that this can be seen as a cornerstone feature throughout the history of the prophetic theology movement. Cf. chapter three.

Such a political expression emerged not as something that could be forced but rather it emerged from below – as a lived expression from the people who, together, witnessed to a different way of being in the world as they sought to live now according to the principles they desired for their land and their future. Neocosmos notes how

... South Africa, particularly urban South Africa, did experience however briefly, a period where the oppressed people did succeed in controlling their own lives as well as in providing an alternative to state structures in the movement for “people’s power”. In practice this social movement was giving rise to a form of mass democracy and a form of state unique in South Africa (and probably also in Africa as a whole). While these forms of popular democracy were never able to establish their dominance especially beyond 1986, they were a central feature of popular or “subaltern” politics at the time.<sup>868</sup>

This embodiment of what “could be” in the midst of the “what is” offers, for Neocosmos, the practice and possibility of an emancipatory politics. After the demise of the apartheid government a shift took place that embraced the neo-liberal concept of “civil society” as the basis for political engagement. This, argues Neocosmos, simply accepts the “what is”. Such a presupposition operates according to the social order that the state itself creates. It already accepts, as its foundation, the ground deemed to be “civil” as the legitimate interlocutors with the state.<sup>869</sup> Neocosmos argues:

In sum, the sphere of activity known as ‘civil’ society must be understood as limited by what the state sees as legitimate political activity and legitimate organizing.... ‘Civil’ society today is then it seems, simply society as viewed from the perspective of the state, the organized interests of society it sees fit to deal with. Any organization challenging the monopoly of state politics – state universality – is therefore bound to be excluded.<sup>870</sup>

And this has become the dominant character of most post-apartheid theologies.

Neocosmos demonstrates how some have simply accepted this new form of politics, attempting to find different ways in which to engage the state. He highlights, for example, the way in which Adam Habib portrays three ways in which civil society

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<sup>868</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 306. I would question whether such “subaltern” politics that rested on popular democracy could, in fact, “establish dominance” or whether that would already be antithetical to such political expression.

<sup>869</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 269.

<sup>870</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 269.

relates to the state: through marginalization, engagement and adversarialism.<sup>871</sup> These depictions, however, are governed and determined by their relationship to the state, leaving little to no room to explore other alternatives.<sup>872</sup> Thus, Neocosmos concludes that “[c]ivil society must be understood as a realm of socio-political activity – of political subjectivity – in which contestation takes place between different political positions, but which ultimately constitutes the limits, structured by the state, of a consensual state domain of politics. Civil society is in fact the state in society.”<sup>873</sup> Put even more bluntly, Neocosmos concludes that civil society is the realm of politics through which the state attempts to exercise its hegemony.<sup>874</sup>

Neocosmos continues his scathing critique on civil society by demonstrating the way research has shown how NGOs are sociologically staffed by middle-class professionals whereby such work provides vehicles for employment and entrepreneurship; they operate as substitutes – on a contract basis – for state functions; and they are funded primarily by the state or foreign donors.<sup>875</sup> Thus Neocosmos argues:

It is in civil society that citizenship rights are said to be realized, however these are to be realized in a manner which keeps them firmly away from any (emancipatory) politics which question the liberal state itself as they take place within the framework of human rights discourse.... However, it is important to stress the fact that civil society is not the only realm of politics outside the confines of the state, and moreover it is possible to suggest that civil society in Africa today forms a realm of politics which is dominated by the state itself. To put the point simply, the politics of civil society are predominantly state politics, for it is the state which ultimately pronounces on the legitimacy of the organisations ‘of’ civil society and of their manner of operation.<sup>876</sup>

This, argues Neocosmos, highlights the different understanding regarding “citizenship” between the popular politics in the 1980s as opposed to that which has emerged in the new neo-liberal political dispensation: “the popular inclusive

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<sup>871</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 268. See A. Habib, "State-Civil Society Relations in Post-Apartheid South Africa," in *State of the Nation: South Africa 2003-2004*, ed. A. Habib Daniel J., R. Southall (Cape Town, South Africa: HSRC Press, 2004).

<sup>872</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 269.

<sup>873</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 271.

<sup>874</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 272.

<sup>875</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 273. Here Neocosmos refers to studies such as M. Swilling and B. Russell, *The Size and Scope of the Non-Profit Sector in South Africa* (P&DM Wits and CCS, University of Natal, 2002) and K. Kanyinga and M. Katumanga, "Citizenship and Rights: The Failures of the Post-Colonial State in Africa," *Africa Development* 28, no. 1 & 2 (2003).

<sup>876</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 271-72.

conception founded on active citizenship and the state conception founded on indigeneity.”<sup>877</sup> Neocosmos highlights the way in which active citizenship, rather than the state conceived notion, provided examples – such as Prophetic Theology noted in chapter three – within the struggle of an alternative, emancipatory form of politics. In accepting the state’s conceived understanding of citizenship and politics, Neocosmos notes how “... ‘success’ as measured by the ability to modify state policy in its particular interests is not the best indicator of a movement’s politics. A variety of social movements sometimes attempt to re-introduce agency but often simply provide a mirror image of state politics. For a politics to provide the basis for emancipation, it has to be situated at a subjective distance from the state.”<sup>878</sup>

Julian Brown<sup>879</sup> offers another window in understanding “politics” after apartheid. He begins his book, *South Africa’s Insurgent Citizens: On Dissent and the Possibility of Politics*, by narrating two commonly held narratives. On the one hand there is the story that focuses on the complacency and decline of how the government has, since independence, squandered its promise and the miraculous beginning of the New South Africa. It is a story that highlights the increasingly disconnectedness of citizens from political engagement. It is a story whereby corruption and nepotism have become prominent features. As Brown puts it: “These are the stories told in the hangover that follows the celebration: stories of the restoration of political banality after the dazzling flash of a miracle.”<sup>880</sup> On the other hand, there is the story told that highlights the significant strides that the government has made in the new political dispensation. It tells about the way in which it has redressed the political, social, and economic inequalities inherited from apartheid. It tells of the way in which formal citizenship has been extended to all, regardless of race; the houses that have been built and provided for the previously disadvantaged; the basic services that more communities now enjoy; and so forth.<sup>881</sup> It is a story that strongly contests the first story.

Brown notes that both of these stories are true – “neither excludes the other.”<sup>882</sup> And yet, they both share a significant shortcoming:

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<sup>877</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 277.

<sup>878</sup> Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible," 274.

<sup>879</sup> Julian Brown is a lecturer in political studies at the University of the Witwatersrand.

<sup>880</sup> Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens*, 2.

<sup>881</sup> Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens*, 2.

<sup>882</sup> Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens*, 2.

they focus on the powerful, and locate politics and political activity in the state and its institutions. When ordinary men and women appear, they are cast either as a chorus, as a crowd carping on the sidelines, or as claimants on the state, as recipients of its largesse. The majority of South African citizens appear as a poorly distinguished mass – and only rarely as actors with real power.<sup>883</sup>

The rest of Brown's book explores the ways in which some ordinary South African citizens are reclaiming and reasserting their political agency, insisting on a radical equality within the social order.<sup>884</sup> Put differently, there is an attempt by a few to reclaim and embody an alternative politics that seeks to put into practice the social order desired. In doing so, it calls into question a) the current political order, and b) the distinction made regarding defined roles used to establish what is "political" and who the presumed political actors are. In building from Jacques Rancière's description of politics, Brown notes how these "insurgents" – those who are reclaiming and reasserting their political agency – begin with a notion of politics that disrupts an established order by a claim that is premised on a strong conception of equality. "Politics occur when a group that has not been recognized as belonging to the social order acts as if it nonetheless has a place, acting as if it were equal to those already empowered, challenging the naturalness of the order, and exposing its contingency."<sup>885</sup> Such an understanding of politics, argues Brown, arises in sites and moments of struggle.<sup>886</sup>

Brown eventually offers the following observation regarding the current South African context, which is worth quoting extensively:

In South Africa, today, our existing society has inequality at its core. The formal political order seems separate from the social and political worlds of ordinary citizens, and the poor. The state and economic institutions are tools of a governing elite. This elite is fractured – and electoral politics are characterised by contests between fractions of this elite for control over the resources and capabilities of the state. At worst, this control might be used to enrich a few at the expense of the majority; at best, it might be used to ameliorate the conditions in which most citizens currently live. Even at best, these actions presume the continuing inequality – not simply economic, but social and political – between those who can control the state, and its largesse, and those who cannot. Despite this apparent disconnection between elites and other citizens, the existing society is also said to be democratic. This claim rests

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<sup>883</sup> Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens*, 3.

<sup>884</sup> Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens*, 3.

<sup>885</sup> Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens*, 5.

<sup>886</sup> Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens*, 6. In this way one can make the connection with Dorothy Sölle who argues that "struggle is the source of hope. There is no hope without struggle" (Sölle and Cloyes, *To Work and to Love: A Theology of Creation*, 161).

on the regularity of “free and fair” elections, and – perhaps more importantly – on the presence of a set of institutions that seek to discipline ordinary men and women’s political expression into forms of responsible citizenship, and thus to give these citizens an appropriate voice in governance. This process, however, often amounts to little more than encouraging citizens to petition the state, and governing elites, for consideration, or patronage. These actions again presume an existing inequality between those inside the state and its bureaucracies, and those outside – ordinary citizens, who must petition those who can hold power.<sup>887</sup>

Brown’s reflection demonstrates how, from his perspective, the notion of power, which is the bedrock in the different way “politics” is understood, also changed. He demonstrates the way in which power shifted from the ideals of the struggle, where the cry “amandla, awethu” rested on the assumption that the people – ordinary people who the principalities and powers disregarded – were actually the ones who held power, to a presumption – over twenty years after the official demise of apartheid – whereby power rests in the hands of the ruling and influential elite.

As though in direct conversation with the post-apartheid theologians analyzed earlier, Brown offers an important caution in the way we work at confronting the new challenges of poverty, injustice, violence, corruption, etc. Brown observes that the common response by those who want to challenge such social woes is to encourage “civil society” to learn to speak together, rather than being a diversity of voices, so that, instead of being a cacophony of noise, a persuasive force is offered that can influence those “in power”. Indeed, such a depiction and strategy is precisely what we have seen specifically in Khumalo and Kairos SA. Brown cautions, however, that

In doing so, this model replicates the presumption of inequality that has shaped the official politics of democracies since their inception: the inequality between those who can speak meaningfully and those who cannot. As Rancière has argued, this distinction marked the limits of classical Greek democracy – and continues to underpin the distinctions between those who have a part in democratic consensus and those who have no such part. If South Africa’s political opposition continues to use this model unquestioningly, then it will replicate the inequalities that mark the country and entrench another system of inclusion and exclusion, control, discipline, and repression.<sup>888</sup>

It is evident that the notion of “politics” has shifted and changed as South Africa’s political dispensation also changed. Selmeczi, Neocosmos, and Brown all help to demonstrate the way(s) in which, during the struggle against apartheid, there was a much broader understanding of politics whereby, even if one was not part of the

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<sup>887</sup> Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens*, 148-49.

<sup>888</sup> Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens*, 160.



state machinery, one knew that their conscious decisions and the actions that followed were understood as acting politically – helping to shape the way in which society would and could relate. One can argue that, in some ways, the Mass Democratic Movement better exemplified the true meaning of “church” (i.e., *ekklesia* – being “the called out ones”), offering a prophetic theological witness which followed the long historical example as portrayed in chapter three, than did much of the church itself in the late 1980s. Part of the reason is because of the broader understanding as to the meaning of “politics” and one’s participation in it. What this section demonstrates, however, is the way in which this broad understanding of politics was already undergoing a shift towards a much more narrow and restrictive sense that came to fruition after 1994 whereby to be political became equated with being involved in or influencing the state’s machinery – i.e., to participate in “civil society”.

The temptation to remain politically relevant as South Africa’s political dispensation changed from apartheid to a democratic state was to become part of the state. In hindsight, however, some are recognizing this as “being co-opted by the state”, a concern that we saw noted specifically by Khumalo and Kairos SA, but which can also be deduced from the other post-apartheid theologies analyzed. Indeed, as noted earlier, the most damning evidence of this “co-option” is the way in which church leaders – some of them seen previously as “prophetic theologians” – entered into the corridors of government. Selmeczi, Neocosmos, and Brown help us, however, to recognize that “being co-opted by the state” does *not* simply refer to those who actually entered into the corridors of government. Rather, we can see how accepting a more narrow understanding of “politics” is to already be “co-opted by the state”. Accepting this more narrow understanding has come to mean accepting the roles and practices as defined by the state; it defines “politics” as the activity of the state and its administration. This, therefore, determines who are seen as legitimate political actors in society. In this way we can see how the notion of civil society itself, which has almost become an uncontested central notion in post-apartheid theology, has accepted the basic distinction between that which is “political” – which refers to the state and its governing ability – from the rest of society and its activity. In this way, society along with theology that has simply accepted this distinction has already become co-opted.

## *A Constantinian Imagination*

The distinction outlined above, whereby politics – that which determines the way in which people in society relate to one another – is the domain of the state and its government, thus ignoring or sidelining the church’s own witness to the politics of Jesus, is a reflection of Constantinianism. It remains imprisoned by a Constantinian imagination. At its most basic level, Constantinianism has become a theological concept beginning in the fourth century that refers to the mutually accepted roles between the state or empire and the church. A Constantinian imagination takes that intimate relationship and its accepted roles as the foundation of what is possible, especially regarding the church’s role and witness in society.

Emperor Constantine’s conversion in 312 CE has been the most prominent departure from the prior Roman practice which initiated a new relationship between Christianity and the Roman Empire. Understandably, this marks a time of transition, optimism, and hope within the church as it brought the promise whereby death and persecution for Christians could finally come to an end. One can only imagine the way in which the church welcomed the change from persecution and saw the emperor’s conversion as the birth of a new era and an answer to prayer; a hope that had been fulfilled. The time of suffering and death because of their faith in Jesus Christ had come to an end. One can hardly blame the church at that time for welcoming the change. Christians during that time saw Constantine and his efforts to legalize the Christian faith as an answer to prayer. Eusebius, for example, could hardly find phrases that would depict sufficiently this new *Christian* Emperor, calling Constantine “almost another Christ,” “the only true philosopher,” and a “vessel of the divine Logos.”<sup>889</sup> Constantine also depicted himself in a similar light, portraying himself as a 13<sup>th</sup> disciple and as a bishop of the bishops – a bishop ordained by God to oversee whatever is outside the church.<sup>890</sup>

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<sup>889</sup> John Howard Yoder, Ted Koontz, and Andy Alexis-Baker, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: BrazosPress, 2009), 58.

<sup>890</sup> Yoder, Koontz, and Alexis-Baker, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, 58.

In retrospect, however, we can see how this marked the beginning of a new era in church-state relations. This has become described as a Constantinian Shift.<sup>891</sup> Such a depiction has drawn sharp criticism as it seems to oversimplify the contextual realities regarding the change in relationship between the church and the Roman Empire. This change – this shift – did not take place overnight. It developed over many years; and it did not happen simply during Constantine’s reign.<sup>892</sup> Constantine’s conversion and the subsequent affirmation of Christianity and the way the church and the empire would come to relate did, however, bring about new “hermeneutical assumptions” (J. Alexander Sider)<sup>893</sup> or “a change that produces new temptations” (D. Stephen Long).<sup>894</sup> This new relationship would eventually serve as the foundation for what would later become known as Christendom – a relationship between the empire or state<sup>895</sup> and the church that accepted a basic division of labour: the former being primarily responsible for the social conditions within the empire (or state), determining the way in which society would be structured and the way those within its geographic boundaries would relate to one another; the latter being primarily focused on the inner, spiritual health of the empire’s citizens.

One of the outcomes of this “shift” was the way in which the church went from being a persecuted minority to becoming the privileged majority in the Roman Empire. It marked the end of persecution, which although sporadic was a constant potential threat, and the beginning of Christianity not only being tolerated, but eventually designated as the compulsory religious expression of the empire by 386

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<sup>891</sup> See John Howard Yoder, “The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics,” in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) and John Howard Yoder, “The Otherness of the Church,” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1998). See also Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something Is Wrong*, Expanded 25th anniversary edition. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014).

<sup>892</sup> Thus Peter Leithart’s criticism. See Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2010). For a more contextually thorough reading of this moment in history, see H. A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). In relation to the shift that took place regarding the church’s wealth and influence, see Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>893</sup> J. Alexander Sider, “Constantine and Myths of the Fall of the Church: An Anabaptist View,” in *Constantine Revisited: Leithart, Yoder, and the Constantinian Debate*, ed. John Roth (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 175.

<sup>894</sup> D. Stephen Long, “Yoderian Constantinianism?,” in *Constantine Revisited: Leithart, Yoder, and the Constantinian Debate*, ed. John Roth (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 105.

<sup>895</sup> Although there is a historic difference between notions such as “empire” and “state”, these will be used synonymously as a description regarding the entity that governs and rules a given society.

CE. This intimate relationship would eventually lead to the ongoing concern in how the church and empire would work together to ensure the “Christianization” of society. Such an intimate relationship, or marriage, inevitably shaped the imaginations regarding the roles and functions of the church and the empire.

Harry Huebner highlights several traits that emerged as a result of the empire’s conversion.<sup>896</sup> First, a distinction emerged between the “visible” and “invisible” church. Whereas the church before Constantine was visible as a socially and publicly constituted counter-body, after Constantine, especially as articulated through the work of Augustine, the true church – true in the sense that it was a community of the faithful and committed – no longer could be assumed to be visible. The “true church” was now found internally, in the hearts of men and women for God alone to see.<sup>897</sup>

Second, there was a separation between the social and the spiritual. Whereas for early Christians the church was itself a socio-political body in that it addressed issues of economics, governance, power, and enemies (i.e., one ought to love one’s enemies), the new relationship between the church and the empire introduced a division of labour – the church dealt with the spiritual and individual, whereas the empire dealt with the physical and political.<sup>898</sup>

Third, this ecclesiological shift resulted in a different way of understanding the way God governed the world. Instead of working through the church’s faithful (pre-Constantinian understanding), God now worked through the emperor. The role of the devoutly religious was to focus on the inner spiritual health of their leaders and provide advice and advocacy so that their leaders could make wise social decisions. The church, argues Huebner, in accepting the invitation to operate within the power structure of the empire, became irrelevant in how the world moves forward. It no longer had a direct role in the process or an alternative process – or political practice –

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<sup>896</sup> Harry Huebner, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics: History, Movements, People* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2012). Although Huebner’s recent book is entitled as an “introduction”, one should not be fooled by its title of its academic rigor, reliability, and comprehensive historical argument. One only needs to pick it up and begin reading the book to recognize that it is no ordinary “introductory” textbook. I use Huebner in this instance as he gives a good summary of the shift that took place pre and post Constantine (i.e., through the “Constantinian Shift”).

<sup>897</sup> Huebner, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 61. See also John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 135–36. Yoder notes that, whereas before the Constantinian shift the church was in the minority, after the shift the whole Empire was now Christian. But the “true church” was still considered to be a minority, it was now simply hidden or invisible. Augustine, the major architect of the concept of the *ecclesia invisibilis*, believed that the true church was perhaps five percent of the visible one after Constantine (Ibid., 136).

<sup>898</sup> Huebner, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 61.

that challenged the ways of the empire. Its “political” function was replaced with a purely “religious” purpose.<sup>899</sup> Charles Villa-Vicencio notes:

The invitation by the Emperor Constantine in 312 CE to the church, hitherto persecuted and prevented from having any direct political influence, to operate from *within* the power structures of the state resulted in the church’s capitulation to imperial demands. Constantine “achieved by kindness”, it has been suggested, “what his predecessors had not been able to achieve by force.”<sup>900</sup>

Fourth, a distinction between the “religious” and the “laity” emerged. In so far as one could speak about the visible church, it became associated with the church hierarchy.<sup>901</sup> This dualism also introduced a distinct ethic between those who were “religious” from the “laity.” John Howard Yoder notes how “[t]he definitions of the faith could thus no longer take the assembly of believers as its base. As a result, therefore, the eyes of those looking for the church had to turn to the clergy, especially to the episcopacy, and henceforth ‘the church’ meant the hierarchy more than the people.”<sup>902</sup> Indeed, Huebner notes how such a dualism possesses an inherent contradiction of the “Constantinian synthesis that affirms that everyone is Christian by law yet confesses at the same time that not everyone is Christian by conviction.”<sup>903</sup> The empire even provided special exemptions to the “religious” as it was beneficial to the empire. Eusebius, for example, comments that “clergy were exempt ‘from all public duties, that they may not by any error or sacrilegious negligence be drawn away from the service duty to the Deity, but may devote themselves without any hindrance to their law. For it seems that when they show greatest reverence to the Deity, the greatest benefits accrue to the state.’”<sup>904</sup>

And lastly, when Christianity encompasses everyone within the empire, an alternate guiding source than the Bible and the insights of the worshipping community

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<sup>899</sup> Huebner, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 61.

<sup>900</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 20. It should be noted that, although I have tried to consistently use terms such as “empire” and “state” according to their proper historical timeframe, thereby hoping to avoid any form anachronism, some of those whose work I quote, such as this quote from Villa-Vicencio, use terms such as “state” synonymously with “empire.” The two, however, are used to refer to the ruling authorities of the day.

<sup>901</sup> Huebner, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 61. H. A. Drake, for example, notes how prior to Constantine the church was largely loosely bound social movement. It was only subsequent to Constantine’s reign, and in large part as a reaction to it, that church hierarchy emerged (Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance*, 28).

<sup>902</sup> Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 136.

<sup>903</sup> Huebner, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 62.

<sup>904</sup> Huebner, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 61.

are sought. The ethic of Jesus, it is assumed, is no longer “realistic” for the way society *en total* relates to itself. Ethical discourse faces two particular tests in Christendom: 1) Can you ask such behavior of everyone? 2) What would happen if everyone did it?<sup>905</sup> Thus, greater emphasis is placed on law and policy-making for the empire as it is now the entity responsible for social and political matters.

The implications of this “shift” are substantial. It changes the ecclesiological character and witness of the church, its political self-understanding and therefore involvement, as well as its missional focus. Whereas before Constantine the church was concerned about its beliefs *and* the way such beliefs were embodied, the church after Constantine became primarily concerned about orthodoxy (i.e., believing correctly). Thus, a disconnect emerged between the beliefs of the church and its lived expression that sought to imitate Jesus’ lived example.<sup>906</sup> Indeed, due to the above traits of this shift, the church was no longer a particular – or peculiar – community as everyone in the empire eventually became, at least officially, part of the church.

Arne Rasmusson provides a good summary:

The Constantinian shift means that the church changes from being a minority to becoming the imperial religion of, with time, almost everyone. Not to be Christian thus required great conviction. This led to the creation of the doctrine of the invisible church as the true believers or the elect still were considered a small minority. The church thus no longer signified an identifiable people, but came to mean primarily the hierarchy and sacramental institution, with the consequence that faith and Christian life primarily were understood in inward terms.<sup>907</sup>

Allan Boesak, likewise, highlights the implications of such a “shift”.

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<sup>905</sup> Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 139.

<sup>906</sup> Tom Yoder Neufeld, for example, in speaking about the early church creeds, asks: “But what if correct belief *and* correct action—orthodoxy *and* orthopraxy—had been linked within the great creeds from the very outset, linked precisely at the point of defining the character and meaning of Jesus?” (Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Recovering Jesus: The Witness of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2007], 29).

<sup>907</sup> Arne Rasmusson, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 222. For an excellent look at the Constantinian shift and the implications for how “conversion” (i.e., what it meant to become “Christian”) was understood, see Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999). See also John Howard Yoder’s *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 135-147; *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2003), 65-84; and “The Disavowal of Constantine: An Alternative Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. by Michael G. Cartwright (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1998), 242-261. See also Stanley Hauerwas, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 74-78.

Before the Constantinian period, the Christian Church was a band of people, ethnically and socially mixed, politically neither influential nor powerful. When under Constantine Christianity became a state religion, however, the Church changed. From then on, Church and State would be allies. The confession of the Church became the confession of the State, and the politics of the State became the politics of the Church. The politics of the Kingdom of God would henceforth be subjected to the approval of Caesar.<sup>908</sup>

Through this “shift”, “power” also underwent a change in meaning. The church begins to assume and understand power in a way similar to that of the empire.<sup>909</sup> Power, or the ability to affect something, including the way in which one relates to others (i.e., politics), came to be understood as a central characteristic and responsibility of the empire as it was given the task to care for the social and the political within its territory. The church, therefore, released its understanding and definition of power and adopted the empire’s understanding.<sup>910</sup> This resulted in the empire relying on the church to justify and bless its use of power as its rightful handler through its practices and conquests.<sup>911</sup> It also resulted in the church beginning to mimic the structure, approach, and sometimes the very goals of the empire itself, as it grappled with the question of power and authority. Charles Villa-Vicencio asserts that

[o]ne of the consequences of the alliance between the historic Constantinian alliance between church and state has been the emergence of a hierarchy of control in the church similar to that which exists within the state. Indeed, in many situations the

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<sup>908</sup> Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 29. Boesak, in fact, continues by saying that “the Fall of the Christian Church” through this Constantinian alliance is precisely when the Church became a white Church (Ibid., 29).

<sup>909</sup> In this way I differ from Oliver O’Donovan’s portrayal of Christendom suggesting that “the rulers of the world have bowed before Christ’s throne” (O’Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*, 195). Not only does this potentially oversimplify the complexity of the changing relationship between the church and the empire in the fourth century (in much the same way as Constantinianism has, which was noted above), but it fails to pay attention to the compromises that took place within Christianity upon entering the Christendom based relationship even if, as O’Donovan argues, it is a response to the church’s mission (Ibid., 195). In this way O’Donovan’s comment that Christendom is not the church “seizing alien power, but by alien power’s becoming attentive to the church” (Ibid., 195) fails to ask whether the concept of “power” referred to is, in fact, the same? Although it is not possible to do so here, it would be worthwhile to further engage the thought of O’Donovan, especially in relation to the argument of this dissertation. For more reflections on the work of O’Donovan see *Public Theology*, vol. 9, no. 3, which is entirely devoted to the work of O’Donovan.

<sup>910</sup> More will be said about this in the next section that focuses specifically on “power”. For a more detailed argument that analyzes the different nature of power, see my paper “Who’ll Be a Witness for My Lord? Witnessing as an Ecclesiological and Missiological Paradigm,” *Missionalia* 44, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>911</sup> For a summary of Christendom, see Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2004).

church is today more authoritarian, more hierarchical, more oppressive and less democratic, less participatory and less liberating than the state.<sup>912</sup>

Likewise, Yoder notes how, through the division of labour between the church and the empire, “mission” in the sense of calling one’s hearers to faith in Jesus Christ also becomes redefined. The empire is now the entity concerned with matters outside of the church, which was equivalent to matters beyond the empire, given that everything inside of the empire is now “Christian” and, at least officially, part of the church. Mission thus became entangled with the ongoing conquests orchestrated by the empire. “Beyond the limits of empire it had become identical with the expansion of Rome’s sway.”<sup>913</sup> Thus, not only did the change in understanding power affect the church’s ecclesiology, but its missional purpose and identity as well. Alan Kreider offers an interesting observation:

As in other areas, in mission there was a gestalt-change. Prior to Constantine, Christianity was not a publicly acceptable *religio*; it was an extralegal *superstitio* that had to remain low-key and meet in private because it challenged commonly held convictions. The church grew, not because imperial campaigns promoted it, but despite the fact that imperial authorities opposed it. The church grew, not because Christianity was a way to prosperity or respectability, but because the Gospel made a practical difference to people’s lives so that people espoused the message freely. As liberated and transformed people, the Christians were attractive. Pagans were both irritated and intrigued when they heard Christians say that ‘they alone knew the right way to live.’ A North African Christian asserted, ‘We do not preach great things; we live them.’ As Lactantius put it, ‘religion cannot be imposed by force... we teach, we prove, we show.’ The attraction of the Christians, who embodied an alternative way of living and were known to possess spiritual power, was sufficient to persuade large numbers of people to undergo the rigors of the Christian journey of catechesis leading to baptism. And the catechesis was rigorous because the Church’s bottom-up missional approach depended on it to form attractively distinctive Christians.

With Constantine the Church’s missional approach began to change—from bottom up to top-down, from attraction to advantage. As emperor, Constantine, even though unbaptized, identified himself with the church, and others came to identify the church with him. The number of Christians continued to grow, but for a new reason: because Christianity was the religion that the emperor promoted. Ambitious people saw that identifying with Christianity was a prudent career choice. The jewel-and mosaic-encrusted basilicas that Constantine constructed conjured an ambience of energy and imperial favor. The privileges, tax exemptions, and gifts that Constantine showered on clergy were designed to make Christianity attractive to ambitious people.<sup>914</sup>

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<sup>912</sup> Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 47.

<sup>913</sup> Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 137.

<sup>914</sup> Alan Kreider, "'Converted' but Not Baptized: Peter Leithart's Constantine Project," in *Constantine Revisited: Leithart, Yoder, and the Constantinian Debate*, ed. John Roth (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 57-58. H. A. Drake makes the argument that the church, which should not be conceived as an monolithic entity but rather as a diverse social movement, became for Constantine another constituency that needed to be delicately balanced with other constituents within the empire. "...[R]uling," notes Drake, "remained a matter of maintaining a delicate balance of constituencies, of an emperor who needed to be endorsed by both military and civil authority, to rule with both *potestas* and *auctoritas*. It was natural for Constantine to think of Christians, once he decided to deal with them,



Kreider continues by demonstrating the many benefits bestowed onto clergy as well as the favour granted to Christians. Ultimately, Kreider argues such a shift affected and influenced the church's imagination as it entered into a partnership with Constantine and the empire.<sup>915</sup> This affected the church's imagination regarding its understanding of power, ecclesiology and ecclesiological structure, its mission and the way it engages missionally, as well as its understanding of gospel and conversion.<sup>916</sup>

With the birth of the modern nation-state and the subsequent embrace of the more secular, liberal ideals – i.e., freedom in all its forms (e.g., religion, speech, press, trade, etc.), individualism, private property, and so forth – the Christendom based relationship between the church and the state became antiquated. One could no longer presume, in a secular state based on freedom, that all citizens belonged to the church. The state, rather than the empire *and* the church, became the one unifying body. It no longer required the close relationship with the church, which was the hallmark of Christendom.

And yet, Constantinianism or a Constantinian imagination continued.<sup>917</sup> Despite the changing relationship between the church and state, the assumed roles that were accepted, namely that the state would care for the socio-political and the church would care for the inner and spiritual,<sup>918</sup> continued into the modern era. The assumption remained that the church, if it had a concern for society, would continue

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as a new constituency and to seek leaders with whom he could deal on the analogy of the Senate" (Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance*, 70-71).

<sup>915</sup> One example worth mentioning is that pertaining to "authority" in the early church. "Authority" was a contested notion in the early church. It is interesting, however, that the early church did not possess an overarching authority structure nor were there official church positions. This changed after Constantine, with 'bishops' becoming clerical representatives of the church in different parts of the empire. Thus, one could argue that church structure and authority structures were a result of the new intimate relationship emerging with the empire. See Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance*, 103-10).

<sup>916</sup> For an excellent, in-depth exploration into some of these themes, especially that of "gospel" and the meaning of "conversion" in light of the church's changed perspective regarding "gospel", see Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom*.

<sup>917</sup> Iris Marion Young and Jacob T. Leby, for example, note how "European colonialism and imperialism[, hallmarks of the empire,] ultimately reached a global scale that dwarfed what had come before" (Jacob T. Leby and Iris Marion Young, *Colonialism and Its Legacies* [Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2011], xi).

<sup>918</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, for example, as he briefly maps out the history of Christendom, notes the culmination of this distinction in the way Luther converted it between secular and spiritual into an "inner—outer distinction": "between the realm of the mind and heart, on the one hand, and the realm of social relations, on the other" (O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*, 209).

to pursue its social relevance through the expressions of the nation-state.<sup>919</sup> “The social arrangement remains, but on the national scale”<sup>920</sup> – i.e., neo-Constantinianism.

William Cavanaugh provides an interesting and in-depth view regarding the birth of the nation-state. He notes that the basic ecclesial assumption present during the birth of the modern nation-state was to understand a country as an organic whole: the state would be responsible for the bodies, the church for the souls.<sup>921</sup> Indeed, “[t]he church... had already handed the bodies of its members over to the state.”<sup>922</sup>

One of the principle myths as to why the physical bodies should be handed over to the state has been the belief that religion is violent in nature. Thus, the state, portrayed as a neutral body concerned for the well-being of all its citizens, could therefore respond to and assist in controlling the violent nature of religion.<sup>923</sup> The modern nation-state is portrayed as the one entity that could bring unity to those who held different doctrinal beliefs. The nation-state becomes, therefore, the peace-maker, the entity that could truly bring about peace in the land as its citizens subordinate themselves for the common good. As a result, religion needed to be relegated to the private life whereas loyalty to the sovereign state provided the necessary grounds to unite those who differed.<sup>924</sup> This, however, maintains the assumed Constantinian roles where the political is separate from the spiritual and the social separated from the personal.

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<sup>919</sup> John Milbank, for example, notes how “[r]eceived sociology altogether misses the positive institution of the secular, because it fully embraces the notion of humanism as the perennial destiny of the west and of human autonomous freedom as always gestating in the womb of ‘Judeo-Christianity’. However, in this respect it is doomed to repeat the self-understanding of Christianity arrived at in late-medieval nominalism, the protestant reformation and seventeenth-century Augustinianism, which completely privatized, spiritualized and transcendentalized the sacred, and concurrently reimagined nature, human action and society as a sphere of autonomous, sheerly formal power. Sociology projects this specific mutation in Christianity back to its origins and even to the Bible. It interprets the theological transformation at the inception of modernity as a genuine ‘reformation’ which fulfills the destiny of Christianity to let the spiritual be the spiritual, without public interference, and the public be the secular, without private prejudice. Yet this interpretation preposterously supposes that the new theology simply brought Christianity to its true essence by lifting some irksome and misplaced sacred ecclesial restrictions on the free market of the secular, whereas, in fact, it instituted an entirely different economy of power and knowledge and had to invent ‘the political’ and ‘the state’, just as much as it had to invent ‘private religion’” (John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* [Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1993], 9-10).

<sup>920</sup> Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 141.

<sup>921</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 16.

<sup>922</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 16.

<sup>923</sup> See William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009).

<sup>924</sup> Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 10.

Cavanaugh challenges the myth that religion is intrinsically violent and argues that the commonly called “wars of religion” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are in fact better understood as the birthpangs of the modern nation-state<sup>925</sup> as it sought to become the one sovereign and objective body, thus ridding and/or subordinating other social bodies, such as the church, in its quest to be the peace-maker among differing and conflicting people prone to violence due to their doctrinal differences.<sup>926</sup> Cavanaugh concludes, however, that far from solving the problem of violence there arose a change in what people were willing to kill for, namely the nation-state.<sup>927</sup> “Ostensibly, the holy was separated from politics for the sake of peace; in reality, the emerging state appropriated the holy to become itself a new kind of religion.”<sup>928</sup>

Cavanaugh acknowledges that the church was implicated in the wars of religion of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and that these wars were really not simply about politics. “The point is that the transfer of power from the church to the state was not the solution to the violence of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but was a cause of the wars. The church was deeply implicated in the violence, for it became increasingly identified with and absorbed into the statebuilding project.”<sup>929</sup> The church, therefore, dismantled itself as a social body and assumed its role of taking care of the moral well-being of the citizens while leaving the political, that is the social well-being of society, to the state. In effect, the church was relegated to the private realm where it sought to continue with its chaplaincy role, while the state assumed its role as the one objective unified body whose concern was the public welfare within its territory. Put simply, the Constantinian imagination continued even within the birth of the modern, liberal, nation-state.

Even in the new, sovereign expressions of the nation-state, the Constantinian imagination remained.<sup>930</sup> Such an imagination continued (and continues) to accept the state as the primary entity concerned with the socio-political realities – i.e., with the

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<sup>925</sup> Kyle Gingerich Hiebert, “Review of *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideologies and the Roots of Modern Conflict* by William T. Cavanaugh,” *The Heythrop Journal* 53, no. 3 (2012).

<sup>926</sup> Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 10.

<sup>927</sup> Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 12.

<sup>928</sup> Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 11.

<sup>929</sup> Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 11-12.

<sup>930</sup> John de Gruchy describes this as the continuation of a Christendom mentality. He notes, for example, how “[e]ven with the demise of the power of the church as a major political institution, the idea of Christendom has persisted” (de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1986], 219).

public realm. The church, such an imagination assumes, is to be primarily concerned with the inner, spiritual, and private realm. John de Gruchy puts it thus:

The essence of Constantinianism is that the church upholds the authority of the state, blessing and sanctifying its policies when necessary, and in return the state protects the freedom of the church to fulfill its religious functions. Under the guise of separating religion and politics into two distinct realms under God, the two-kingdoms theory achieves a remarkable synthesis of mutual self-interest. The religious realm is protected and the political order legitimated. Prophecy ceases, or else is used to serve the interests of those in power and to justify their crusades. In turn, the church may receive some limited voice in the shaping of public policy, but the degree of such participation will vary according to the relationship the church has to those in power.<sup>931</sup>

Instead of seeing and depicting itself as responsible to another sovereign reign, such that a confession that “Jesus is Lord” requires, the church accepts and subordinates itself to the sovereignty of the state.<sup>932</sup>

The basic temptation, argues Yoder, is for churches – and this has been true for both Catholic and Protestant – to identify themselves “with the power structures of their respective societies instead of seeing their duty as calling these powers to modesty and resisting their recurrent rebellion.”<sup>933</sup> The results of which are new phases or attempts towards unity (or partnership) between the church and the state – new forms of neo-Constantinianism.<sup>934</sup> At the heart lies the temptation for the church to accept its subservience to the state due to its own acceptance that it ultimately does not possess the same form of effective power than that of the state. Such a temptation, argues Yoder, is the basic axiom of Constantinianism (in all its forms): that the true meaning of history – “the true locus of salvation”<sup>935</sup> – is at work in society and not in the church.<sup>936</sup> “What God is really doing is being done primarily through the

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<sup>931</sup> De Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 219-20.

<sup>932</sup> Antonio Negri, for example, demonstrates the attitude already present within Cartesian philosophy surrounding what he describes as provisional morality – the juxtaposition of bourgeois autonomy on the one hand and a repressive apparatus that does not desire its expansion on the other – to “not change the order of the world, follow the more moderate ideas, obey” (Antonio Negri, *The Political Descartes: Reason, Ideology, and the Bourgeois Project*, Radical Thinkers [London; New York: Verso, 2006], 179).

<sup>933</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania; Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1998), 195.

<sup>934</sup> Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 195. Robert J. Suderman describes this ongoing tendency as an addiction – we are addicted to a Christendom or Constantinian based imagination. The church feels responsible, argues Suderman, to be something it is not, thus the addictive behavior of needing to be in partnership with the state. See Suderman, *Re-Imagining the Church*, 166-67.

<sup>935</sup> Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 198.

<sup>936</sup> Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 198.

framework of society as a whole and not in the Christian community.”<sup>937</sup> As such, the church accepts its role as the handmaiden or chaplain of the state, attempting to influence the state in how it uses its power rather than remembering the unique power it has been given.

Cavanaugh’s depiction of the church’s surrender of the physical body to the state and the dismantling of other social bodies that may be in competition with the state’s sovereignty and rule is apparent in Reinhold Niebuhr’s understanding where he argues that the religious ideal in its purest form “has nothing to do with the problem of social justice.”<sup>938</sup> Niebuhr concludes that “relations between groups must therefore always be predominantly political rather than ethical, that is, they will be determined by the proportion of power which each group possesses at least as much as by any rational and moral appraisal of the comparative needs and claims of each group.”<sup>939</sup> Niebuhr specifies that the political, thus social, viewpoint stands in direct opposition to religious life and morality that has an innate focus on the individual.<sup>940</sup> This religious life and its emphasis on individual morality, argues Niebuhr, is the main focus of the church. He concludes, therefore, that the church does not participate in the political realm of the nation or in politics in general.

Thus, for Niebuhr, the pursuit of justice is quite clearly the responsibility of the state as it is responsible for the relations of groups, whereas the pursuit of justice lies outside of the realm of the church, as the church’s primary role is the seeking of morality within individual believers. And yet, it is assumed that if a truly transformed person were at the helm of society (i.e., “in politics”), he or she would be able to implement public policy that would be more in line with the Christian gospel. This ensures that, although each person within society may not be individually transformed by Christ, society at least would continue to move towards a Christian trajectory.

The irony, of course, is that those typically described as conservative evangelicals, whose theology tends to match that which the *Kairos Document* describes as “Church Theology” – an apolitical theological orientation, have also come to accept this particular logic and its corresponding relationship between church

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<sup>937</sup> Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 198.

<sup>938</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York, N.Y.: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932), 263.

<sup>939</sup> Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, xxiii.

<sup>940</sup> Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 259.

and state.<sup>941</sup> Although the main objective of “Church Theology” is to seek the personal conversion of the individual,<sup>942</sup> which is to bring him or her to an experience of God that transforms their being towards a more Godly character, the often stated secondary interest is to grow in influence so as to have an impact upon political decision makers and the political direction of the country. We have already observed this tendency in Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal theology. The assumption is that if key political figures can be influenced, then public policy could order society towards a more Christian moral standard.<sup>943</sup> Billy Graham often serves as a role model where, because of his ability to convert and evangelize, he has become so influential that the U.S. head-of-state would regularly call on him for his support and council. As Herald Bloom writes in an article in *Time* magazine (June 14, 1999), “Graham’s finest moment may have been when he appeared at President Bush’s side, bible in hand, as we commenced our war against Iraq in 1991. The great revivalist’s presence symbolized that the Gulf crusade was, if not Christian, at least biblical.”

Emmanuel Katongole provides valuable insight to some of the ramifications of a Constantinian imagination in Africa. In his book *Mirror to the Church*, Katongole demonstrates how the story of Rwanda’s genocide of 1994 provides a mirror to the church and the type of Christianity we have come to assume. “[I]t helps us,” he argues, “realize what little consequence the biblical story has on the way Christians

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<sup>941</sup> Allen J. Goddard, for example, in his doctoral thesis demonstrates the way the Students’ Christian Association (SCA) in South Africa, circa 1965-1979, “reflected the confident ‘chosenness’ and hegemonic spirit of mid-twentieth century evangelicalism, with its Christendom-like methods of mission.” He continues by stating that “[i]n this way SCA blended evangelization with statecraft-like governance procedures, sometimes even with coercion, by a Council that mostly approved of, but too often also obstructed work for the common good, to perpetuate its own authority” (Allen J. Goddard, “Invitations to Prophetic Integrity in the Evangelical Spirituality of the Students’ Christian Association Discipleship Tradition: 1965-1979” [University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2016], 27).

<sup>942</sup> Gerald West describes the form of “Church Theology” as that which seeks to maintain and legitimate the structures that constitute the status quo of the church and its unworldly, private, and individualistic form of faith and spirituality (West, “Kairos 2000,” 56).

<sup>943</sup> For example, during the 2012 U.S. election campaign, a news article on a religious website stated that “Republican presidential candidate Rick Santorum won the support of more than 150 leaders and representatives of conservative and Christian groups at a gathering in Texas this past weekend” “Tony Perkins, president of Family Research Council, [one of the organizers of the event] said that ‘after praying for the nation’s future,’ conservative leaders took the first steps in ‘advancing a true conservative candidate toward the nomination.’” (Catholic News Agency:

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/over-150-conservative-leaders-decide-to-back-santorum>. Accessed January 17, 2012). The truly amazing thing about the support shown by leaders and representatives of conservative Christian groups is that they knowingly threw their weight behind a conservative *Catholic* candidate; something that would have been unthinkable in the past.

live their lives in the West,”<sup>944</sup> which has, he notes, subsequently been exported to Africa and other contexts. Katongole focuses on Rwanda’s tragic history to ask the question: how could a “Christian nation” – a nation that some say was over 90 percent Christian – engineer and participate in the genocide that took place in Rwanda in 1994?

Ultimately, Katongole argues, Rwanda’s story should cause us to re-think and re-imagine our understanding of Christianity and our political allegiances – indeed our understanding of “politics” in general. Through Rwanda’s story, Katongole demonstrates the separation that has become assumed within Christianity – whereby faith and belief have become separate and distinct from the way one lives his or her life. A separation has arisen between the inner, personal, spiritual life of Christians from the way in which they live and relate to others (i.e., socio-political matters). This, argues Katongole, is the way in which Christians have come to accept the “separation of church and state”. He offers the following summary:

Politics is about how we negotiate our social life through laws, structures, and controls. Religion is about how we negotiate the inner life through systems of belief and mystical experience. In the official rhetoric of this compromise, church and state are separate but equal.<sup>945</sup>

Given this logic that serves as the bedrock of a Constantinian based imagination, Katongole demonstrates the different “postures” that Christians and the church have adopted in operating from this foundation when they seek to be socially engaged, especially in relation to politics and economics. The first is the “Pious posture”. This posture, Katongole argues, seeks to be obedient and law-abiding, seeking to do what is right. Rarely do those who assume this posture stop to question and stand up against injustice forcing them not to bow to earthly authorities. Katongole uses Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21) as an example of this.

Simon serves at great personal cost, carrying the cross as the soldiers commanded.... But Simon never stops to ask why Jesus is being crucified. He does not question the twisted authority that would kill the Author of life. No, Simon’s pious posture prevents him from seeing that there are times when we are called to stand up against injustice and not bow to earthly authorities. Simon carried the cross obediently.<sup>946</sup>

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<sup>944</sup> Emmanuel Katongole and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2009), 85.

<sup>945</sup> Katongole and Wilson-Hartgrove, *Mirror to the Church*, 94.

<sup>946</sup> Katongole and Wilson-Hartgrove, *Mirror to the Church*, 98.

This, we can see, is similar to what the KD describes as Church Theology. Note Katongole's conclusion regarding such a posture:

Those who assume the pious posture value obedience, but they need not be meek. Often they are bold in their faith, using social influence to invite political leaders to experience a personal relationship with Jesus. One operating principle of this posture is that the gospel, once accepted in the hearts of the politically powerful, will trickle down to the rest of society. Resources and energy are directed toward evangelistic efforts aimed at people of influence. If the chief of a tribe converts, he will bring his tribe with him. If the president of a nation becomes a born-again Christian, the gospel will somehow trickle down to the nation's citizens.<sup>947</sup>

The second is the "political posture". Like the religious leaders who worked with the political authorities of Jesus' time to ensure his prosecution, this posture assumes a realist approach to Christian social engagement, using the power that is available to the church – the power of the state – to do the most good possible.<sup>948</sup> "The political posture," argues Katongole, "takes responsibility for the world as it is and does not worry about compromising itself by getting involved in the systems and processes of this world."<sup>949</sup> Loyalty, Katongole argues, is a central trait in such a posture. Those who assume such a posture are often offended when anyone disrespects the recognized authority of the nation state or the loyalty thereto.<sup>950</sup> This could, to use the language of the KD, be equated with State Theology.

And the third is the "pastoral posture". Compassion, argues Katongole, is the central feature of this posture. "After nation states or paramilitaries or revolutionary forces have done their damage, the church comes in to do its work of mercy."<sup>951</sup> Although this is not bad, it often fails to critically engage and raise questions into the conditions that create people's need in the first place.<sup>952</sup>

The tragedy, of course, is that we stand aside while the demonic cycle of death-dealing steals, kills, and destroys the bodies and souls of people. In the spring of 1994, Rwandan priests served communion to members of their parishes who took a break from killing to attend worship services. Their hypocrisy is evident to all of us. What we do not see as clearly, however, is how a military chaplain blesses unjust wars while baptizing traumatized soldiers or how a ministry to the homeless accepts the

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<sup>947</sup> Katongole and Wilson-Hartgrove, *Mirror to the Church*, 100.

<sup>948</sup> Katongole and Wilson-Hartgrove, *Mirror to the Church*, 103.

<sup>949</sup> Katongole and Wilson-Hartgrove, *Mirror to the Church*, 103.

<sup>950</sup> Katongole and Wilson-Hartgrove, *Mirror to the Church*, 104.

<sup>951</sup> Katongole and Wilson-Hartgrove, *Mirror to the Church*, 106.

<sup>952</sup> Katongole and Wilson-Hartgrove, *Mirror to the Church*, 107.



economic assumptions of a system that continues to make people poor. Our pastoral posture trains us to meet the immediate needs of people without asking too many questions.<sup>953</sup>

This posture is present in both State and/or Church Theologies.

Rwanda, Katongole concludes, has exposed the lies of Christendom.<sup>954</sup> It also, I would add, demonstrates the way in which Christianity, along with modern nation-states, have continued to operate according to a Constantinian or neo-Constantinian imagination. Such Christianity fails to ask one of the most fundamental questions: to whom or to what kingdom does our allegiance ultimately belong? What's more, such Christianity fails to overcome its Constantinian foundation which assumes one can only become socially relevant when it contributes to the social and material processes as determined and controlled by the nation state.<sup>955</sup> This is a failure, argues Katongole, of imagination. It is a failure to recognize and embody – live a life that seeks to express such an imagination – that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is not merely a spiritual reality, but

is a concrete social, material, political, and economic reality that is ushered into existence by God's revelation in history. The failure of Christian social imagination is a failure to imagine and live in this new reality, which in 2 Corinthians 5:17 St. Paul refers to as God's 'new creation.'<sup>956</sup>

Katongole continues this line of argument in his book *The Sacrifice of Africa: a Political Theology of Africa*. In it he argues that part of the reason for the church's failure of imagination is due to the church's co-option of what it means to be "political". The church has released its unique perspective of the politics it is called to embody, handing "politics" over to the empire or nation-state. This, he argues, is due to the church's forgetfulness of the type of stories that shapes it: "Who we are, and who we are capable of becoming, depends very much on the stories we tell, the stories we listen to, and the stories we live. Stories not only shape our values, aims, and goals; they define the range of what is desirable and what is possible."<sup>957</sup> The dilemma, of course, is that the church has, for much of its history – since 312 CE –

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<sup>953</sup> Katongole and Wilson-Hartgrove, *Mirror to the Church*, 107-08.

<sup>954</sup> Katongole and Wilson-Hartgrove, *Mirror to the Church*, 110.

<sup>955</sup> Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 50.

<sup>956</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 59.

<sup>957</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 2.

accepted as part of its story that which depicts “politics” as that which refers to state politics. Put another way, the church has accepted the myth (i.e., the story) that the empire or nation-state and its government is the entity responsible for the way society is shaped and the way it functions. One can deduce that this is not the original story that the church is called to embrace or embody. Thus we encounter a conflict as to which story will shape us. Note carefully his comment about the way Christians often describe their desire to work at ensuring that political systems – the nation-state in particular – works better:

Therefore, the most urgent task for Christian social ethics is to make politics work better, that is, become more democratic and transparent, with the expectation that properly functioning nation-state politics in Africa will ensure peace and stability and thus advance development.

Yet these recommendations do not pay sufficient attention to the possibility that politics in Africa, and the nation-state in particular, have not been a failure, but have worked very well. Chaos, war, and corruption are not indications of a failed institution; they are ingrained in the very imagination of how nation-state politics works. To put the argument differently, while Christian social ethics in Africa have focused on providing strategies for revising, improving, or managing a failing institution, they have paid very little attention to the story of this institution: *how* it works and *why* it works in the way it does.<sup>958</sup>

Shifting our focus from seeking strategies that attempt to make “political” institutions (i.e., government) work better to a focus on stories allows the myths of particular stories to become apparent while providing the opportunity to explore what stories we want to be shaped by. It changes our understanding of politics from how to govern and rule to understanding it as “dramatic performance grounded in a particular story that requires, and in the end shapes, particular characters.”<sup>959</sup> Ultimately this changes and offers an array of new possibilities in what we want to be grounded, how we want to be shaped, and what we want to shape; it steps out of understanding politics as a mere determinative account of reality, offering creative new political possibilities that breaks free from the imagination that depicts the nation-state as the sole bearer of politics.<sup>960</sup>

The problem, continues Katongole, is that the institutions of church and state, in their mutually supportive Christendom based relationship, are taken for granted, failing to engage the founding story of nation-state politics or imagining the

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<sup>958</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 2.

<sup>959</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 3.

<sup>960</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 4.

possibilities of Christian social existence.<sup>961</sup> Thus, Christianity's competency as a religion is held captive "in the spiritual and pastoral fields of life, and surrenders the determination of social-material processes to the realm of politics."<sup>962</sup> Thus, the Constantinian imagination remains intact. And, in so doing, Katongole notes:

Christianity uncritically assumes the same foundational narrative that denies and sacrifices Africa, and in the end becomes indistinguishable from the social sphere characterized by desperation, violence, and corruption. In this way, Christianity not only lets down Africa; it also surrenders a key soteriological claim about Christ's power to save.<sup>963</sup>

Katongole highlights several implications in accepting this Constantinian imagination, most of which we already noted earlier in this chapter. The first implication of this imagination is the acceptance that the church itself only possesses "influence" but not real power. Power to make change, it continues to be assumed, rests in the hands of the nation-state.<sup>964</sup> Second, should the church desire to engage socially, it takes on an NGO-like form. "Having surrendered the social sphere to the realm of politics,"<sup>965</sup> notes Katongole, the church's main task, rather than pursuing its own theologically based socio-political ends, is seeking to assist the general well-being of society in ways that are deemed to be socially responsible, which is often determined by the nation-state. This we have already noted through the work of Neocosmos above.<sup>966</sup> "[The church] must get involved lest it appear to be irrelevant. But for its contribution to be considered relevant, it must not require Christian convictions, stories, or beliefs. In other words, the more active and relevant the church might appear to be, the less distinctively Christian its contribution must be."<sup>967</sup> The

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<sup>961</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 21.

<sup>962</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 21.

<sup>963</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 21.

<sup>964</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 43. Katongole states: "The practical implication of this observation [whereby the church assumes it only possesses 'influence' with regards to social realities] is that even though the church appears to be one of the most viable and active institutions, especially in the rural areas, where nation-state influence seems minimal, the churches live with a posture of uncertainty, as if waiting for the real power to show up to provide the determinative frame of references for social and material realities" (Ibid., 43).

<sup>965</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 44.

<sup>966</sup> See pg. 228 ff.

<sup>967</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 46. A practical anecdote from the Pietermaritzburg (South Africa) context may help to demonstrate Katongole's point. Founded in 1979 as the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness as a way to raise awareness among white Christians and draw them into the struggle against apartheid, PACSA changed its name in 2012 to Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action so as to recognize its broader scope regarding its work along with inviting the possibility of broader range of funders.

third implication is that the church surrenders its own social vision and uncritically adopts the vision, life, and ethos of those determined by “the determinative institution of nation-state politics.”<sup>968</sup> As noted above, Katongole believes Rwanda is particularly instructive regarding this third implication.

... [N]ot only did many Christians, including church leaders, fail to offer any form of marked resistance to the call to eliminate the Tutsi in 1994, many killings took place within the churches, with Christians killing other Christians. The church had been so thoroughly socialized by the dominant vision of Rwanda as a society inherently marked by Hutu-Tutsi rivalry that the elimination of the Tutsi “cockroaches” was easily projected as a civic duty.<sup>969</sup>

The church, in other words, carried on the vision of that which was determined by an alternative narrative – that of the nation-state – and not by its own socio-political vision. Katongole continues:

The church was in fact incapable of questioning this structure of tribal conflict (grounded in the Hamitic story) or offering any credible alternative because it had never understood its mission in terms of political imagination, but only in terms of providing relevant contributions to the politics of the day.<sup>970</sup>

Katongole asks a particularly poignant question: Can there be another story? Can we come to understand the church beyond a Christendom or Constantinian imagination? Can there be “a story of self-sacrificing love that involves a different notion of power and thus gives rise to new patterns of life, engendering new forms of community, economics, and politics?”<sup>971</sup> This will be our guiding question in the next chapter.

### *The Question of Power*

Here we must pause and explore how this relates to the question of power as this is a central aspect regarding a Constantinian imagination and the potential to move beyond it. Indeed, we need to stop and explore what kind of power a

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<sup>968</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 47.

<sup>969</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 47.

<sup>970</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 47.

<sup>971</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 20.

Constantinian imagination assumes. This will help us explore whether there are alternatives, which we will look at in more detail in the next chapter. But first, what do we mean when we talk about “power”? In what way does power become manifest?

At its most basic meaning, power means the ability to cause something. It causes something to happen. John Holloway, for example, defines power as “can-ness, capacity-to-do, the ability to do things.”<sup>972</sup> He notes how in many languages the noun for “power” is the same as the verb “to be able” (e.g., *poder*, *pouvoir*, *potere*, *Vermögen*). Paul Tillich defines power as that which causes something to be.<sup>973</sup> Power represents the very act of creation.<sup>974</sup> This raises the question, however, as to what we are creating? What are we causing to be? Answers to these questions inevitably touch on *how* we cause something to be. This is important as the way in which we cause something inevitably causes and creates something else; that which we create is caused by the way in which we create it. Thus, our actions – that which cause something to happen – have the ability to enact different methods in *how* we create something. This points to the possibility of different forms of power that one can embody which will bring different things into being.

Power, especially in relation to society (i.e., in the social sphere), is often defined as having “the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events.”<sup>975</sup> Such a definition, however, already makes the interpretative move of portraying power – the ability to cause something and/or bring something into being (i.e., to create) – as being that which one can influence or force.<sup>976</sup> John Holloway describes this as a fracture from “power-to” (i.e., power-to-do and thus doing itself) to “power-over”. “Power-to”, which he argues is never an individual reality but rather part of a social flow, becomes projected onto others who are then supposed to execute that which has been conceived. “Doing is broken as the

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<sup>972</sup> Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power*, 28.

<sup>973</sup> Tillich continues to describe power as “the possibility of self-affirmation in spite of internal and external negation. It is the possibility of overcoming non-being” (Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1960], 40).

<sup>974</sup> Thus John Howard Yoder, in his exegesis of “the powers” in the New Testament, begins with the reminder that they were part of God’s good creation. Creation itself is an expression of power, which was deemed to be good. See Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 141. Likewise, Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz explores Jürgen Moltmann’s depiction of God’s *ruach* as the creative power and the power of life. See Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and the Power: The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 184-86.

<sup>975</sup> See “Power” in Oxford Dictionaries, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/power>.

<sup>976</sup> Thus the phrases that emerge such as: “we force someone’s hand”, “we forced them to choose”, “we forced them into a corner”, etc.

‘powerful’ conceive but do not execute, while the others execute but do not conceive.”<sup>977</sup> Paul Tillich describes this form of power as “compulsive power” – force over others. Although Tillich argues that compulsive power is not inherently negative in that it is simply actualizing itself over against the threat of non-being, it does become negative when it does not express the power of being of which it seeks to give expression.<sup>978</sup> “Power needs compulsion, but compulsion needs the criterion which is implied in the actual power relation.”<sup>979</sup> Thus, when power becomes manifest in such a way that it acts in a different way than that which it ultimately seeks, it becomes a negative force in that it negates the being of its desire. It therefore negates the being of the other – i.e., it destroys.<sup>980</sup> Holloway describes this as the destruction of our subjectivity (as opposed to the assertion of our subjectivity).<sup>981</sup> Thus, compulsive power that forces becomes the manifestation of violence as it negates the being of something else.<sup>982</sup> In this way we are reminded of James’ inconvenient yet crucially important lesson: the way in which we sow our seeds matters.<sup>983</sup>

This understanding of power as “the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events” is the cornerstone of a Constantinian-based imagination. It assumes, as noted above, the Christianization of society. What’s more, it assumes that the state, as it is in a position of authority over others, is the one to enforce this within (or upon) society. It becomes easy therefore for the church and its theology to ignore issues of power<sup>984</sup> as power is equated with politics and vice versa (e.g., “power politics”<sup>985</sup>). Here, for example, Oliver O’Donovan fails to provide the necessary nuance regarding “power” in his depiction of Christendom as a

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<sup>977</sup> Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power*, 28.

<sup>978</sup> Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 47-48.

<sup>979</sup> Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 48.

<sup>980</sup> Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 46.

<sup>981</sup> Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power*, 29.

<sup>982</sup> Holloway, for example, continues by arguing that whereas “power-to” unites and brings together (it brings together my doing with the doing of others), the exercise of “power-over” separates. “The exercise of power-over separates conception from realisation, done from doing, one person’s doing from another’s, subject from object. Those who exercise power-over are Separators, separating done from doing, doers from the means of doing.... Power-over breaks mutual recognition.... The doing of the doers is deprived of social validation: we and our doing become invisible. History becomes the history of the powerful, of those who tell others what to do” (Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power*, 29).

<sup>983</sup> James 3:18 reads: “Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

<sup>984</sup> For a specific critique in how this has come about in the South African context see Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 174-78.

<sup>985</sup> Interestingly, Tillich describes “power politics” as a special type of politics that is separated from justice and love and is identified solely with compulsion (Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 8).

response to the church's mission. O'Donovan argues that Christendom "is constituted not by the church's seizing alien power, but by alien power's becoming attentive to the church."<sup>986</sup> His depiction, however, still portrays power as something foreign to and/or separate from the church as power rests on the shoulders of the secular. The result being, as Tillich highlights, an indifference regarding politics from the side of religion or an emphasis on mere compulsion and force from the side of politics.<sup>987</sup> Indeed, in defining power as that which is based on compulsion and force, power, as we see in O'Donovan, is simply projected onto those who have political or social positions of influence, especially those in government. The result is that power is then understood primarily as a force that causes, or rather forces, a particular behaviour and way of being in society *onto* others. This, argues John Milbank, creates a foundation based on an "ontology of violence": a reading of the world that assumes and is based on force and counter-force.<sup>988</sup> It is rooted on coercion, imposition, and domination. This I describe as "power from above".

The question is whether there is another way of understanding power and what that may look like. This we will explore in the next chapter. At this point it can be highlighted, based on the discussion above regarding power and the Constantinian basis from which such an understanding emerges within the church, that power has come to be understood and embodied – in the desire to "direct and influence" – as a tool of subjugation, oppression, and domination.<sup>989</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to analyze why Prophetic Theology has, at best, become silent or, at worst, evaporated and disappeared in the post-apartheid era. In exploring this question we analyzed some of the underlying assumptions present in

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<sup>986</sup> O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*, 195.

<sup>987</sup> This is so precisely because love and power have been separated from each other. Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 12.

<sup>988</sup> This, Milbank highlights, is the outcome of secular liberalism. See Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 4.

<sup>989</sup> Walter Wink offers the following observation: "The failure of churches to continue Jesus' struggle to overcome domination is one of the most damning apostasies in its history. With some thrilling exceptions, *the churches of the world have never yet decided that domination is wrong*" (emphasis original; Walter Wink, *When the Powers Fall: Reconciliation in the Healing of Nations* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998], 11).

the KD itself as well as in Albert Nolan's depiction of prophetic theology. This chapter also looked more analytically into some of the post-apartheid theologies that have emerged after apartheid.

In analyzing Prophetic Theology as depicted in the KD and the work of Nolan, this chapter suggested a few potential reasons why such a theology failed to make the transition into the post-apartheid context. One reason is the way in which, even though there has been a long history to the opposite, there remained a strong reliance in the perceived ideal of the state being the entity responsible for the political. Both the KD's and Nolan's depictions of Prophetic Theology fail to acknowledge the counter-political witness that had already existed in the South African context which ultimately gave rise to an embodied theological expression from which the KD emerged and in which Nolan himself participated in the first place, which continued through their practice.

A second reason was the way in which the struggle and its theology became focused on simply removing the oppressive apartheid government so that a new, democratic government could come into power. Although a counter-political witness came to be embodied in the struggle against apartheid, its theology (i.e., Prophetic Theology) seemingly became antiquated once the apartheid government was no longer in power as the democratic dispensation was seen as the arrival of the *eschaton*. Prophetic Theology became an antithesis – a reactionary form of theology – to apartheid and its unjust government rather than an ongoing theological orientation. Ultimately it lacked the eschatological depth that recognizes the struggle to participate in God's peaceable kingdom despite whatever government is "in power".

Third, although both the KD and Nolan offer a challenge for the church to get involved in the struggle for (true) peace and justice during the time of apartheid, there remained an assumed separation between the church and politics. Politics remained the responsibility of the state. Thus, once again, such a theology failed to recognize its own counter-political witness. Thus, it failed to provide an ecclesiological foundation that operates on and offers such a counter-political witness.

This chapter also analyzed more carefully the post-apartheid theology that has emerged since 1994. It highlighted the way in which the above issues quickly came to fruition regarding the loss of Prophetic Theology. This chapter demonstrated the way in which the understanding of "politics" shifted during this time, leading to the conclusion that if one wanted to be politically relevant s/he needed to become



involved in one way or another with the state enterprise. Indeed, many of those considered to be “prophetic theologians” entered into state centred politics because of this assumption. This shift also relegated the church to “civil society”, accepting the change in how “politics” as such was understood. This chapter noted how post-apartheid theology assumed that if the church was to be socially engaged it would need to do so as part of “civil society”, trying to influence the state as it becomes the legitimate handler of power and politics – i.e., the entity that determines the way in which people in society should relate. This chapter then suggests that accepting this line of reasoning accepts the church as either an apolitical entity or that which participates in the state’s form of politics. The church falls into the pit of either Church Theology or State Theology. Either way, however, it fails to offer a Prophetic Theology.

At the foundation of both State Theology and Church Theology, which is the pit that much of post-apartheid theology has fallen into, is the way in which the Constantinian imagination continues to be dominant, especially regarding the church’s assumed role in society. In better understanding this Constantinian imagination we can see the way both State Theology and Church Theology are the flip side of the same coin. They both rest on and operate from the assumption that there is a division of labour and responsibilities given to the state and the church: the state being responsible for the socio-political realities; the church for the inner, personal, spiritual health of the state’s citizens.

Prophetic Theology, although at times slipping into accepting a Constantinian imagination (recognizing that many that would be considered as “prophetic theologians” came from ecclesial traditions deeply entrenched in Christendom/Constantinian based ecclesiological histories), offered an alternative to such an imagination before 1994. Prophetic Theology stepped out of the Constantinian prescribed responsibilities and its assumption regarding power and began to embody an alternative political reality in how people and communities formed by such a theological persuasion could live and relate to one another in the face of the governing authorities. What becomes apparent throughout this chapter’s analysis is the way in which post-apartheid theology has largely fallen back into the Constantinian trap. It has, to a large extent, reverted to the distinct roles and responsibilities assumed of the state and the church, what it means to be political, along with the way power is understood and embodied. Much of post-apartheid

theology continues to be tempted to portray the church as a partner with whom the state can work. It depicts the two as potential companions on the journey towards Christian faithfulness: the state enforcing a more Christian society. What it fails to acknowledge, however, is the form of power that the church *does* have to which it is called to witness; an alternative understanding of power which offers a counter-politics than state politics that is based on domination and violence.

Emmanuel Katongole puts it well:

... [M]y frustration with social ethics in Africa is not about its [the church's] failure to come up with practical recommendations for improving the nation-state institution and its politics; indeed, there are too many of those. My greater frustration is with its failure of imagination, with the assumption that the nation-state institution is the only possible structure for modern social existence in Africa.<sup>990</sup>

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<sup>990</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 59.

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## Re-claiming and re-embodiment a Prophetic Theology: An Anabaptist Perspective

*“How can the old structures of injustice be transformed? By spreading the new structures. Jesus announces a new social order.... You can change structures by being the messianic community, by being the new, just structure.”<sup>991</sup>*

“Prophetic Theology” in the South African context provided an embodied alternative political reality. It embodied emancipatory practices that offered an alternative vision of South Africa’s future and alternative ways of relating. It offered an alternative political witness. Such practices were prophetic precisely because they challenged and offered alternatives to the social construct the apartheid state created and sought to maintain. As this study has demonstrated, however, such a theological persuasion has largely dissipated in the post-apartheid context. The previous chapter highlighted ways in which even that which was designed to be “prophetic” has, largely, fallen back into the Constantinianism paradigm, accepting a theological imagination that served as the bedrock of State Theology or Church Theology – theologies that Prophetic Theology criticized and sought to move beyond. Post-apartheid theology has reverted back to accepting the division of labour that serves as the hallmark of Constantinianism: the state being primarily responsible for the socio-political realities of society; and the church being responsible for the inner, spiritual health of its members. Should a church be socially engaged, it has largely accepted

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<sup>991</sup> Larry Miller, “What does ‘Peace Church’ Mean?” From Church and Peace Steering Committee Meeting, Versailles, October 1977 as quoted in Andreas Ehrenpreis et al., *Brotherly Community--the Highest Command of Love: Two Anabaptist Documents of 1650 and 1560* (Rifton, N.Y.: Plough Pub. House, 1978), vii. Larry Miller was the General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference, the global body of Anabaptist related churches, from 1990-2011.

being part of civil society as its rightful place whose function, it is assumed, is to either be pastoral and/or influence the state in the way it uses its power in ordering society. Either way, such theology has accepted the church's position as lying outside of the political realm.

In the previous chapter we noted how Emmanuel Katongole portrayed approaches the church has adopted in being socially engaged; approaches that are similar to the KD depictions. Katongole describes three common Christian approaches in its attempt to be socially engaged: the pious posture (which can be compared with "Church Theology"), the political posture (which can be compared with "State Theology"), and the pastoral posture (which can be compared with either "Church" or "State Theology").<sup>992</sup> Such approaches, notes Katongole, accept and operate from a Christendom or what I describe as a Constantinian based imagination – accepting the dualism and separation of the inner from the outer, the personal from the social, and the spiritual from the political. Such approaches and assumptions, Katongole argues, do not offer a Prophetic Theology. Katongole ends with an important question: Is there another way? Is there another story that can help shape an alternative imagination?

Katongole makes some suggestions. For example, in order to begin to offer such an alternative imagination the church must be willing to live and be located on the margins.

The search for a 'different world right here' involves a physical and existential relocation to marginalized and overlooked places and communities. The search for 'a different world right here' is the search for a new, dynamic presence and experience of church, particularly in the marginalized places in Africa. But marginality does not simply refer to physical geography; it also includes leaving behind the dominant story of power and violence that has shaped African social history.<sup>993</sup>

This chapter seeks to take Katongole's question and suggestion seriously. And it does so by exploring a movement and theology that has often existed on the margins of the Christian story since the Reformation – Anabaptism. It will explore the way in which Anabaptism and Anabaptist theology offers an alternative perspective, different assumptions, and different practices which, I argue, can help re-claim and re-embody a Prophetic Theology in the South African context today.

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<sup>992</sup> Katongole and Wilson-Hartgrove, *Mirror to the Church*, 96-108.

<sup>993</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 123-24.

This chapter will begin with a brief historical overview of the Anabaptist movement, highlighting some of its characteristics that have emerged from its 500 year history that has given shape to its ongoing faith expression. I will then focus on the ways in which such a faith expression has influenced or has been contextualized and embodied in South Africa. With this as our backdrop we will then explore an Anabaptist perspective on eschatology, power, and ecclesiology, seeing how such perspectives can assist in reclaiming a Prophetic Theology today.

### *Challenges in offering a synthesis of Anabaptism*

A synthesis of any faith movement or religious identity is complex. This is also, perhaps, especially true of Anabaptism. One challenge is that, due to its very nature and theological persuasion, there is no one particular set of convictions, dogmas, or “correct beliefs” (i.e., orthodoxy) that can easily be articulated as “Anabaptist”. There is not only one Anabaptist position; there are multiple perspectives. One cannot, in other words, talk about *the* Anabaptist position. One can only speak about *an* Anabaptist perspective. Anabaptism was a movement that emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Its theological persuasion underscored communal belonging and communal discernment as key features that shaped the way faith was understood and embodied by the community. This was so because of the seriousness Anabaptists, both historical and contemporary, have taken the notion of “the priesthood of all believers,” believing that God, through the Holy Spirit, can speak through anyone. The church, therefore, is a community whose members have made a conscious and voluntary decision to be part of creating a body that seeks to discern what the Spirit is saying.<sup>994</sup>

This leads to a second challenge, namely that the embodiment of faith is just as vital as what the community believes. Orthopraxis is a mandatory partner of orthodoxy. Belief cannot be divorced from the embodiment of such beliefs. In Anabaptism, this has led to a strong emphasis on discipleship. In offering an

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<sup>994</sup> John Driver for example states: “It does not fall to the clergy nor to the individual to be the interpreter of the Bible, but to the church as a community of faith and obedience” (John Driver, *Contra Corriente: Ensayo Sobre Ecclesiología Radical* [Bogotá, Colombia; Guatemala, Guatemala: CLARA; SEMILLA, 1998], 5).

“Anabaptist perspective”, therefore, this work is but one perspective within the larger communal conversation in terms of how the church as a community shapes and forms its communal practices and the ways it embodies the Christian faith in the world. There may be – indeed will be – those who will disagree with this study’s portrayal of “an Anabaptist perspective” – and this is good as it continues the process of discerning communally and keeping the communal journey accountable in faithful living (i.e., discipleship). This process of discernment continues to test whether that which is offered to the community is of God. This does, therefore, highlight the importance of those traits or characteristics that those within the Anabaptist movement have come to agree on.

I raise these challenges simply to recognize that there may be some exceptions to the brief historical depiction of Anabaptism that this study offers. Secondly, these points are raised as this thesis seeks to offer a constructive Anabaptist theology recognizing that there may be some exceptions or disagreements regarding the offered perspective in this chapter which is described as “Anabaptist”. This said, I will offer an account in the hope that it may feed the discerning process towards faithful living.

### *Anabaptism: a brief overview*

Anabaptism emerged in 1525 as a response to and a continuation of the reformation already in progress since 1517. The 16<sup>th</sup> century was a tumultuous time, especially in the life of the church with many seeking its renewal and reform. The inauguration of the Reformation with Luther posting his 95 theses was a strong challenge against the Catholic Church and some of its practices and doctrines.<sup>995</sup> The concern being that the Catholic Church at that time was relying more on the authority of tradition than on scripture, especially when reformers saw incongruences between the two.

The early Anabaptists celebrated what Martin Luther initiated. Their concern was that Luther, and the other early reformers, only offered partial reformation of the

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<sup>995</sup> The most grievous of these for Luther was the selling of indulgences—blessings that could be purchased in order to limit the amount of time a person spent in purgatory. This proved to be the “straw that broke the camel’s back” as it drew attention to many other issues of concern.

church.<sup>996</sup> Indeed, the desire of the Anabaptist movement was not to simply “reform” the church and society but to “restore” the early church. Central to this conviction was the understanding that the church is a visible body of those who believe in Jesus Christ and who voluntarily follow in his ways. It is for this reason that the early Anabaptists were also described as “Radical Reformers”. Not only were their convictions “radical” – in the conventional understanding of the term (i.e., extreme) in 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe as it challenged some of the basic assumptions regarding the church and Christendom society – but it sought to “return to the roots” of Christianity, which is the etymological meaning of the term “radical.” Thus, due to their ecclesial conviction, Anabaptists were often suspicious about the close relationship the other reformers (Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, etc.) maintained with the state.<sup>997</sup> The relationship typical of Christendom remained intact even within the different churches that emerged during the Reformation (e.g., the Lutheran, Reformed, and then Anglican churches). The early Anabaptists were, therefore, some of the first proponents to embrace an understanding of the separation of church from state.

Ultimately the Anabaptist understanding regarding the relationship between church and state came down to a question of loyalty and allegiance: to whom did the Christian pledge allegiance? To which kingdom did Christian loyalty belong: to the kingdom of God or the kingdoms of this world, i.e., the state and its princes? Whereas Luther and the other reformers had a two-kingdom theology that allowed – indeed expected – the responsible Christian to participate in both the state and the church,

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<sup>996</sup> Cornelius J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History*, Third ed. (Waterloo, ON & Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1993), 31.

<sup>997</sup> This is not to deny that there was a wide range of perspectives within the Anabaptist movement surrounding the question of government, state, and the church’s relationship with them. The Swiss Brethren, for example, were much more legalistic in their separatism from the state whereas others, such as Pilgram Marpeck, had less of an antagonistic view of the state. And yet, as we will see, even someone like Marpeck who had an on-again-off-again civil servant relationship with the state, distinguished between the loyalties between the state and God’s kingdom. For example, Marpeck reminded his fellow believers that temporal government is good and served a Godly purpose insofar as it carried out its task justly. “Only where temporal rulers abuse their authority, and especially where they try to use their coercive power in spiritual affairs, are Christians called ‘to act against the Authority, remain faithful to God, and surrender bodily life in patience and love to the government as the Authority over the flesh but not over the Word and the Spirit’” (Brian Cooper, “The Power of Conscience and Witness: Natural Law in Pilgram Marpeck’s Thought on Church and State,” in *Creed and Conscience: Essays in Honour of A. James Reimer*, ed. Jeremy M. Bergen, Paul Doerksen, and Karl Koop [Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2007], 93). See also Stephen Blake Boyd, *Pilgram Marpeck: His Life and Social Theology*, Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992) and William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, eds., *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, Classics of the Radical Reformation (Kitchener, Ont.; Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1978).

Anabaptists, who also largely held to a two-kingdom theology,<sup>998</sup> believed that one's primary responsibility and loyalty was to the ways of Jesus. For them the question was whether they would participate in and therefore witness to the ways of God's kingdom or would they participate in the ways of the world (i.e., sin, the sword, etc.)? It has been noted that the early Anabaptists, and even those who are descendants of the Anabaptist movement (e.g., Amish, Hutterites, Mennonites, etc.), possessed too simplistic a view as to whether one could separate and distinguish the two kingdoms – the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of God. Are they not more intertwined than the way they have been portrayed? Is separation from a sinful world?<sup>999</sup> These are relevant and important questions. The emphasis among the early Anabaptists, however, was more on what the Christian should do when incongruences between the demands of the state and those of Jesus arose. An example was the question of the sword. Should a Christian serve the state by participating in ways that wield the sword, such as war and other civic duties that required violence, given Jesus' command to love one's enemies? The early Anabaptists held the conviction that Christians were called to follow Jesus and his ways above all else.

Baptism became perhaps the most visible, symbolic, and significant practice regarding the question of a Christian's allegiance. The early Anabaptists, who had been previously baptized as infants, did not believe in the validity of their infant baptism as they were not able to consciously decide whether they were willing to be part of the church and follow in the ways of Jesus. Thus, they "re-baptized" themselves, which is the literal meaning of "Ana-baptism". And this became the hallmark trait of Anabaptists – those who practiced adult baptism.

Although adult baptism does have its roots in the Anabaptist movement, the practice of "re-baptizing" was far more serious and complex – and frankly revolutionary – than is often depicted. By the time of the Reformation infant baptism was commonplace. It was inaugurated just after Constantine in response to Augustine's theology pertaining to original sin, which also led to his depiction of the *ecclesia invisibilis*. And it came to serve a dual function within Christendom: it

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<sup>998</sup> See, for example, Harry J. Huebner, *Echoes of the Word: Theological Ethics as Rhetorical Practice* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005), 84-106.

<sup>999</sup> This is, for example, Travis Kroeker's fundamental issue with the work of Harry Huebner. See P. Travis Kroeker, "Making Strange: Harry Huebner's Church-World Distinction," in *The Church Made Strange for the Nations: Essays in Ecclesiology and Political Theology*, ed. Paul G. Doerksen and Karl Koop (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011).



offered both church membership and registration within the state. Those born within a given state were, therefore, born into that particular state's church and its diocese.<sup>1000</sup>

The concern for the Anabaptists was that this practice did not change among the reformers and the churches emerging during this time (e.g. the Lutheran, Reformed, and, later, Anglican church). A close and intimate relationship between the church and the state continued. Thus, to practice adult, or believers, baptism was not only a challenge to infant baptism, it was seen as a serious offence as it threatened the social construction and stability of Christendom society. Kirk R. MacGregor puts it thus: "Since infant baptism typically served as the cornerstone of the church-state Christendom amalgam, whereby the child was enrolled in the census and granted citizenship, marriage privileges, and inheritance rights, most magistrates found the abolition of this practice quite threatening to civil stability and wished to punish rebaptizers."<sup>1001</sup>

The practice of adult baptism offered an alternative ecclesiological foundation. It distanced itself from the relationship with the state. State churches, as they benefitted from the assurance that all within a state's particular territory belonged in that state's church, provided justification to those who fulfilled ones moral duty to the state and its sanctioned and directed violence.<sup>1002</sup> Anabaptists understood the Christian's moral duty first and foremost to be to Jesus and the ways of God's kingdom. Christendom churches maintained the requirement of pledging allegiance and loyalty to a particular state even when the demands of the state were incongruent with those of Jesus.<sup>1003</sup>

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<sup>1000</sup> H.A. Drake offers an interesting observation in how Diocletian introduced "diocese" as an additional layer of government that stood between the province and the imperial court making the government more centralized (Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance*, 116). It is striking, therefore, to see how the church incorporated such organization into its own ecclesial structure.

<sup>1001</sup> Kirk R. MacGregor, *A Central European Synthesis of Radical and Magisterial Reform: The Sacramental Theology of Balthasar Hubmaier* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2006), 144.

<sup>1002</sup> Indeed, Ulrich Zwingli relied on the state itself to reform the church in Zurich otherwise known as the Magisterial Reformation. See Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History*, 32.

<sup>1003</sup> This commitment often led to a stance of not participating in government. As noted above, however, Pilgrim Marpeck, one of the early Anabaptist leaders, maintained an on-again-off-again relationship with the state, serving in a civil servant capacity for most of his life. And yet, Marpeck was regularly sent away from cities in which he was employed because he would often challenge the authority of the city councils. Brian Cooper demonstrates how Marpeck maintained that temporal governments were not bad in-and-of-themselves. They became so when they exceeded their temporal authority – as they are prone to do – and try to use coercion to do the work of God's Kingdom or abuse the authority entrusted on them (Cooper, "The Power of Conscience and Witness," 92). Another obvious example that was an exception was the debacle in Münster. And yet, it is also worth noting the way in which the Münster rebellion was *not* affirmed or supported by the other Anabaptists during that

Thus, although Anabaptists were described as *ana-baptists* (re-baptizers), baptism as such – as a rite or symbol – was simply the tip of a much larger iceberg. The question of baptism was not only a question whether someone believed in Jesus Christ. This would have been expected among all within Christendom Europe. Rather, it became a question of loyalty and allegiance.<sup>1004</sup> Christopher Rowland<sup>1005</sup> suggests that “[a]t the heart of the whole baptismal experience is the clear message of a transfer from one dominion to another, involving the acceptance of Jesus Christ as king of kings and lord of lords.”<sup>1006</sup> Anabaptists saw infant baptism as accepting Christendom society, and thus accepting the relationship between the state and the church along with one’s duty to the state, which was often violent. “Believers” or “adult baptism,” on the other hand, was to pledge loyalty and allegiance first and foremost to Jesus as Lord whose ways are instructive in how his followers are to act. But this requires a conscious decision, something that could not be made as an infant. Thus, although baptism became perhaps *the* symbol that defined the early Anabaptists, and was often the legal reason for their death sentences in their subsequent persecution, it was an act that redefined their whole outlook on life – and death. It altered their understanding of what it meant to be Christian and a Christian community (i.e., the church). The question as to which kingdom one would pledge allegiance to provided the bedrock for a new social vision.

The origins of Anabaptism are diverse and varied. Mennonite/Anabaptist historians have largely come to accept a polygenesis perspective regarding Anabaptist origins. Given its diverse and varied origins, it is difficult to articulate definitive tenets of Anabaptism at the beginning of its movement.<sup>1007</sup> And yet, although we need

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time and thereafter. For a brief synopsis of this story see Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 35-40.

<sup>1004</sup> Lydia Harder, for example, notes: “The affirmation of the Lordship of Jesus was the central conviction which allowed Mennonites to see the possibility of human and divine in relationship to each other” (Lydia Marlene Harder, “A Hermeneutics of Discipleship: Toward a Mennonite/Feminist Approach to Biblical Authority” [University of Toronto, 1993], 62).

<sup>1005</sup> Christopher Rowland is Dean Ireland’s Professor of the Exegesis of Holy Scripture in the University of Oxford and a priest in the Church of England.

<sup>1006</sup> Christopher Rowland, “Anabaptism and Radical Christianity,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 74 (2000): 552. Rowland continues in his reflection on baptism: “The rites of Christian initiation have kept alive that sectarian spirit, which is of the essence of Christianity. What is so striking about the New Testament texts is that they were written by people who had little or no political power. They nevertheless evince a vision of the world at odds with the prevailing ideology, and their writers dared to offer their common life as the pattern for all humanity” (Ibid., 552).

<sup>1007</sup> This is made more complex when, as James Coggins notes, history is written from the point of view of the winners. Therefore, the interpretation offered from either the Protestant or Catholic camps

not focus on determining the normative expression for all who would become described as “Anabaptist”, we can highlight some of the traits that have come to be identified with Anabaptism and the alternative theological and ecclesial expression it provided in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and thereafter. James Coggins suggests that part of the reason for such variation is its sensitivity to contextual realities: “...one of the reasons for the variations within Anabaptism may be that it was opposing a varied Protestantism.”<sup>1008</sup>

Arnold Snyder, a contemporary Mennonite/Anabaptist historian acknowledges that the polygenesis historical paradigm has seemingly won the day when it comes to describing the disagreements and the sometimes-chaotic origins of the Anabaptist movement. But, having acknowledged this, he argues that multiple origins does not mean essentially different Anabaptisms or essentially different Anabaptist theologies. Agreement and consensus also emerged.<sup>1009</sup> “If one is to understand the changes and developments within Anabaptism over time,” notes Snyder, “it is truer to the sources, and a more fruitful historical model, to begin with the significant shared core of Anabaptist theological beliefs that cut across all geographical areas.”<sup>1010</sup>

In following Snyder’s lead, confessions – and the practice through which they emerge – prove to be important and telling examples regarding Anabaptist theology and its character. Whereas most theological reflection after Constantine prioritized “proper belief” (orthodoxy), being thus concerned primarily with theological cogency despite contextual realities, Anabaptist theology arose much more organically out of particular contextual realities (e.g., the German Peasants’ War). The gathered community put such contextual realities to the test. In this way the community, rather

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in the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the 19<sup>th</sup> century is hardly flattering. Indeed, many other movements – some of them violent – deemed undesirable were simply lumped into the “Anabaptist” category. Thus, for almost four centuries, Anabaptism has largely simply been dismissed by all previous historiography as “revolutionary and fanatic” (James R. Coggins, “Toward a Definition of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism: Twentieth-Century Historiography of the Radical Reformation,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 4 [1986]: 184).

<sup>1008</sup> Coggins, “Toward a Definition of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism,” 196. Coggins goes on to offer an example: “German Anabaptists stressed discipleship soteriology and the importance of the Holy Spirit in response to Luther’s stress on justification by faith alone and Scripture alone. Swiss Anabaptists stressed sectarian ecclesiology in response to the Reformed stress on the city as a sacral society” (Ibid., 196).

<sup>1009</sup> Arnold Snyder, “Beyond Polygenesis: Recovering the Unity and Diversity of Anabaptist Theology,” in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*, ed. H. Wayne Pipkin (Elkhart, Indiana: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994), 8-9, 25.

<sup>1010</sup> Snyder, “Beyond Polygenesis,” 25.

than orthodoxy or dogma, was central.<sup>1011</sup> This does not mean that Anabaptists were not concerned about what one believed. Indeed, there were many discussions and arguments that sought to convince, admonish, and/or keep one another accountable; such was the role of the church. Such reflections (and admonishments!), however, arose *because of* a deep concern about the contextual realities they as a community faced. As Snyder notes:

The shared inner boundaries of Anabaptist belief were not static limits installed and maintained for all time.... There were differences in original emphasis (as the polygenesis historians rightly indicate) and the working out of common Anabaptist beliefs was subject to change over time. The commonalities shared by all Anabaptists identify only the inner, common limits of a dynamic and changing movement.... Anabaptist must be conceived in the first instance in organic, generational, and developmental terms.<sup>1012</sup>

It is also worth identifying how the early Anabaptists seldom had the luxury to write about some of their core beliefs and theology because of the persecution they experienced.<sup>1013</sup> Confessions of faith, however, served as avenues through which the community could galvanize. They provided the means to articulate assumptions that were held in common. Confessions were unifying documents.<sup>1014</sup>

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<sup>1011</sup> The historian David Sabeau suggests, in reflecting on the Germanic rural communities, which would have been the base of many of the early Anabaptists, that such communities were not simply united out of familial bonds or a specific set of shared values that provided a corporate purpose. Rather, he notes how communal boundaries were often more defined by the fact that “members of the community [were] engaged in the same argument, the same *raisonnement*, the same *Rede*, the same discourse, in which alternative strategies, misunderstandings, conflicting goals and values are threshed out” (David Sabeau, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* [London, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984], 13-36). I thank John Roth for highlighting Sabeau’s work in his “Community and Conversation: A New Model of Anabaptist Hermeneutics,” in H. Wayne Pipkin, *Essays in Anabaptist Theology* [Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994]). It is worth highlighting the way Roth draws a correlation by arguing that if Sabeau is indeed correct than “The Anabaptist use of scripture can be described best not as a set of fixed, normative hermeneutical principles, but rather as a series of arguments or debates into which participants were drawn precisely because they agreed on the importance of the issue being debated. The summary of Anabaptist hermeneutics compiled by the traditional historiography is helpful therefore in that it points toward a *frame of reference* within which discussions and disagreements regarding proper Biblical exegesis took place” (John Roth, “Community as Conversation: A New Model of Anabaptist Hermeneutics,” in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*, ed. H. Wayne Pipkin [Elkhart, Indiana: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994], 44).

<sup>1012</sup> Arnold Snyder, “Beyond Polygenesis: Recovering the Unity and Diversity of Anabaptist Theology,” in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*, ed. H. Wayne Pipkin (Elkhart, Indiana: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994), 16.

<sup>1013</sup> Thomas Finger, “Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist/Mennonite Tradition,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 76, no. 3 (2002): 282. For an in-depth account of the many deaths many Anabaptists faced, see Thieleman J. van Braght and Joseph F. Sohm, *The Bloody Theater, or, Martyrs’ Mirror*, 15th ed. (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1987).

<sup>1014</sup> Snyder notes how this changes after, roughly, the first century within the Anabaptist movement where more rigid boundaries of different Anabaptists groups formed. “It is only at the end of this

Thomas Finger demonstrates the way Anabaptist (and later Mennonite) confessions have often emerged as an opportunity to identify what is common. In this way, confessions serve, argues Finger, as “living letters”; letters that act “as instruments to promote commitment, identity and unity with pluralism; and to enhance worship, mission, teaching, ethical behavior and theological reflection.”<sup>1015</sup> Whereas “dead letters” are often “fixed, finalized sets of propositions, distant from the actual life of churches, save when invoked for purposes of inclusion or exclusion,”<sup>1016</sup> confessions within Anabaptism provide a glimpse into what a group – a church body – believes at a particular time. One can see how this practice of exploring what is held in common moves beyond, offering an alternative approach to, that which was typical in Christendom Europe. Indeed, as we will come to see later, it moves beyond the prescribed ecclesial (and state) authority in determining what should be believed (i.e., what is “orthodoxy”).<sup>1017</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, many of the early Anabaptists were declared “heretics” precisely because they challenged the very manner in which orthodoxy was determined; it challenged state supported ecclesial authority. Anabaptism, rather, placed authority to interpret and discern into the hands of the commoner, the particular believer, and the gathered community. It was not, in other words, reliant on the ecclesial (or magisterial) hierarchy. Such a hermeneutical practice highlights the egalitarian and anticlerical tendency of the Anabaptist

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dynamic story of development and generation that we come to the rigid definition of boundaries for Anabaptist groups who, in spite of historical commonalities of belief and shared experiences of persecution and martyrdom, nevertheless came to the conclusion that salvation was to be denied even to the Anabaptist brethren outside their own group” (Snyder, “Beyond Polygenesis,” 26). This is when there was more of a distinction among the different groups (e.g., Swiss Brethren, Hutterites, Mennonites, etc.).

<sup>1015</sup> Thomas Finger, “A Confession of Faith as a Living Letter,” in *Holding Fast to the Confession of our Hope* (Elkhart, Indiana: Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 2006), 18.

<sup>1016</sup> Finger, “A Confession of Faith as a Living Letter,” 18.

<sup>1017</sup> Christopher Rowland provides an interesting reflection on a story taken from the *Martyrs Mirror* which became important for his own approach to the Bible. It’s a story of Jacob, a sixteenth century peasant who was arrested for his Anabaptist activities who was then questioned by a friar in a local court. During this time of questioning, Jacob quoted the book of Revelation, to which the friar responded:

“‘What do you understand about St. John’s Apocalypse?’ the friar asked the Chandler. ‘At what university did you study? At the loom, I suppose? For I understand that you were nothing but a poor weaver and Chandler before you went around preaching and rebaptizing.... I have attended the university of Louvain, and for long studied divinity, and yet I do not understand anything at all about St John’s Apocalypse. This is a fact.’ To which Jacob answered: ‘Therefore Christ thanked his heavenly Father that he had revealed and made it known to babes and hid it from the wise of this world, as it is written in Matt. 11:25.’ ‘Exactly!’ the friar replied, ‘God has revealed it to the weavers at the loom, to the cobblers on the bench, and to bellows-menders, lantern tinkers, scissors grinders, brass makers, thatchers and all sorts of riff-raff, and poor, filthy and lousy beggars. And to us ecclesiastics who have studied from our youth, night and day, God has concealed it’” (taken from Rowland, “Anabaptism and Radical Christianity,” 551).

movement. Anabaptist hermeneutics were rooted theologically, scripturally, and practically among those who formed the Anabaptist community.<sup>1018</sup> Thus, rather than assuming one correct interpretation of scripture, there seemed to have been more interest in allowing contextual realities to shape and determine the significance of faith in general and, more importantly, the way it should be embodied given the varied contextual realities. And so, as Hans-Jürgen Goertz demonstrates how ideas tend to be a result of the socio-economic context rather than vice versa;<sup>1019</sup> beliefs and practices that converge, rather than diverge, and become important elements and moments throughout the Anabaptist movement.

Perhaps one of the most significant moments of Anabaptist self-identity and common (and communal) commitment was the 1527 Schleithem Confession.<sup>1020</sup> This is the first known Anabaptist confession of faith emerging out of the Swiss Brethren. The diversity of the Anabaptist beginnings along with the speed in which Anabaptism was growing throughout Europe, especially among the peasants and commoners, gave need for more clarity as to what those who considered themselves as “Anabaptists” held in common. The Schleithem Confession (SC) in many ways provided an initial opportunity to articulate some of their common convictions and practices. Such an opportunity became vital in their process of self-identification.<sup>1021</sup> Others have offered more thorough observations about the SC eliminating the need to do so here.<sup>1022</sup> This study will simply offer a few observations regarding the confession, its process, and on a few of its articles.

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<sup>1018</sup> Snyder, "Beyond Polygenesis," 18. See also Harder, "A Hermeneutics of Discipleship," 51-116. Harder's important work does, however, also demonstrate the traps in which Mennonites, whose roots come from the Anabaptist movement, have fallen into as this egalitarianism with regards to authority in the community has not been consistently embodied. This is especially true when it comes to the experiences of women in the community.

<sup>1019</sup> As mentioned in Coggins, "Toward a Definition of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism," 197.

<sup>1020</sup> Otherwise known as the “Brotherly Union of a Number of Children of God Concerning Seven Articles” (or “Brotherly Union” for short).

<sup>1021</sup> C.J. Dyck, for example, comments that “[t]his was not a representative meeting to which delegates came each to vote for the position of their supporters, and whose conclusions represented a minimum to which they could all agree without changing their minds. The persons who gathered at Schleithem came together in disagreement and confusion, testifying later that during the meeting the Holy Spirit had led them to agreement and common convictions” (Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History*, 55).

<sup>1022</sup> For other sources on the Schleithem Confession see Gerald J. Mast, *Separation and the Sword in Anabaptist Persuasion: Radical Confessional Rhetoric from Schleithem to Dordrecht* (Telford, Pa.; Scottdale, Pa.: Cascadia Pub. House; Herald Press, 2006), Karl Koop, *Anabaptist-Mennonite Confessions of Faith: The Development of a Tradition* (Kitchener, Ont.; Scottdale, Pa.: Pandora Press; Herald Press, 2003), Walter Klaassen, "The 'Schleithem Articles' and the 'New Transformation of Christian Living'," *Historical Reflections* 14, no. 1 (1987).

One important observation that must be noted, even before analyzing specific convictions made therein, is the way the SC emerged. The SC begins by stating: “The articles we have dealt with, and in which we have been united...”<sup>1023</sup> This opening line highlights that the subsequent seven articles of the confession are those on which those who were gathered could agree. It does not, interestingly, specify everything on which they disagreed. This confession, as Finger argues, arose not as something that the leaders or clergy determined and enforced. It arose, rather, through the gathering of a community and the process of communal discussion and ultimately agreement. Its focus on convergence instead of divergence through discussion and discernment has become an important practice within Anabaptism. The practice of communal discernment has become a practice whereby members of the ecclesial community listen to each other assuming that God through the Holy Spirit can speak through any one of them. It did not require clerics or clergy – typical positions of ecclesial authority – to be the intermediaries of God. It was a concrete practice of “the priesthood of all believers”. This process demonstrates, however, the anticlerical and anti-hierarchical tendency of the Anabaptist community,<sup>1024</sup> embracing a different understanding of power that did not rest on the clergy, clerics, or elite within society. Thus, the beginning of the SC highlights how, if the gathered and committed community (a commitment that would be demonstrated through believers or adult baptism) could come to agreement, this represented a moment worth celebrating and holding on to.

The SC goes on to offer seven convictions or commitments, which it describes as articles. The seven articles are on: (1) baptism, (2) the ban, (3) the breaking of bread, (4) separation and separation from the world, (5) shepherds of congregations, (6) the sword, and (7) the oath. Although we do not have the space to delve into each of these articles, it behooves us to pay attention to the ways in which the SC provided an alternative example during the context of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Rather than accepting the close relationship with the state which was assumed in other ecclesiological structures, including those that were emerging (i.e., the

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<sup>1023</sup> John Howard Yoder, ed. *The Schleithem Confession* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1977), 10.

<sup>1024</sup> Snyder, "Beyond Polygenesis," 18. We can also see this sentiment in the Schleithem Confession itself where it references as an abomination all “popish and repopish works and idolatry”; a reference to the Pope as well as those who, even though they may also be among some of the reformers, continued to embrace much the same type of authority as the Pope.

Lutheran, Reformed, and, later, Anglican churches), the SC articulated a conviction regarding the relationship between the church and state that was substantially different to that of Christendom. This would ultimately be described as a “separatist tradition” as the SC articulated a separation between the church from “the world”. This led to several different forms of “political arrangements” among the early Anabaptists as they tried to figure out how best to respond to the hostility they experienced from the state and other Christian groups.<sup>1025</sup> It articulated an understanding of the church – the intentionally committed and gathered community – as separate, distinct, and apart from society or “the world”; a society which, we must remember, was during this time based on and structured according to a Christendom presumption. Anabaptism offered an alternative ecclesiology from Christendom-based ecclesiologies in that it operated on the assumption that the visible church of conscious believers was to emulate the ways of Jesus causing it to live differently than “the world”. At first glance this stated desire could be interpreted in a way similar to the “other-worldly” focus of Pentecostals and other contemporary Evangelical groups. Yet, it must be noted that, although there were undoubtedly some who held such an “other-worldly”, spiritualist, view (e.g., the “spiritualists” such as Caspar Schwenckfeld), most of the early Anabaptists understood this desire for separation from “the world” to be more about distinguishing themselves from the ruling powers of the world and Christendom society. This ultimately challenged the other ecclesial structures that did not require such a distinction. Indeed it called into question the “Christianity” of Christendom Europe!

There are several examples in the SC that demonstrate an understanding of the church as an alternative community. The first article looks at the question of baptism. Whereas the Christendom church baptized infants, the SC offers an understanding of baptism as an intentional, conscience decision to “walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and be buried with Him in death,”<sup>1026</sup> which was understood all too well as

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<sup>1025</sup> Snyder, for example, notes five different forms of “political arrangements” from seeking to be a form of official state religion (e.g., Balthasar Hubmaier), to the attempt at Münster which sought control of the state (which, Snyder notes, was the only example), to separate relationships with the state, which were more tolerant in some places and less so in others. Snyder argues that the separatist tradition regarding politics was a progression that emerged rather than an *a priori* assumption from the very beginning. For more see C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1995), 177-84.

<sup>1026</sup> “Schleitheim Confession,” Anabaptistwiki, [http://www.anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php/Schleitheim\\_Confession\\_\(source\)#cite\\_ref-34](http://www.anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php/Schleitheim_Confession_(source)#cite_ref-34). Accessed October 5, 2016.



many Anabaptists had already been killed because of their faith and baptism, which would soon include those who drafted this confession.<sup>1027</sup> Baptism was viewed as the outward sign performed before the gathered community to symbolize the inward change that has happened through the “baptism of the Spirit”. And this was in preparation for the “baptism of fire” (i.e., persecution) that was sure to come. Baptism, as noted above, proved to be a significant symbol that highlighted the shift in allegiance – from the state, and all the practices that this entailed, to Jesus.

Besides the obvious example of adult or believers baptism, “the ban” (article II), rather than a tool for exclusion (although it became used in this way later), was designed as a tool that would encourage discipline, or rather a disciplined life, within the church. It speaks about the necessity for each follower of Christ to walk in His ways – i.e., live a life of discipleship.<sup>1028</sup> If one did not, then the community was to hold him/her accountable.<sup>1029</sup> It is also noteworthy that “the ban”, unlike the violence used through Christendom society in ensuring doctrinal order, was the maximum form of discipline that could be used. It was an attempt to eliminate the use of violence within the believing community.<sup>1030</sup>

In the SC, the church was seen as an alternative community. The breaking of bread (article III), for example, focused on community building as those who were to partake in the breaking of bread needed to be reconciled with one another (i.e., be in good relations) in order to participate. Article IV regarding separation from “the world” also arose out of a desire for the church to live a life of obedience to God’s will and God’s goodness. This includes disavowing the use of violence:

Thereby shall also fall away from us the diabolical weapons of violence--such as sword, armor, and the like, and all of their use to protect friends or against enemies--by virtue of the word of Christ: “you shall not resist evil.”<sup>1031</sup>

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<sup>1027</sup> See, for example, the *Martyr’s Mirror* – a massive volume that describes the death and martyrdom of many of the early Anabaptists.

<sup>1028</sup> The purpose of “the ban” (section II), for example, pertains to the life of discipleship required by those who “have given themselves over to the Lord” (Yoder, *The Schleithem Confession*, 10) rather than a practice of exclusion. The phrase “to walk after” the Lord is translated from the German *nachwandeln* which is the closest approximation to the concept of *nachfolge* – or discipleship – which would later become a central concept among Anabaptists (cf. note #17 in Yoder, *The Schleithem Confession*, 24).

<sup>1029</sup> Yoder, *The Schleithem Confession*, 10-11.

<sup>1030</sup> As noted above, however, one can argue that “the ban” did become a violent tool in the way communities would excluded some.

<sup>1031</sup> “Schleithem Confession”.

The emphasis on peace, nonviolence, and nonresistance has become a prominent trait of Anabaptism. The sword, as noted above, which was a way to describe violence in general, is portrayed as a tool of “the world”; a tool, therefore, that the community of disciples should shun.<sup>1032</sup> Not only does it provide the theological reasoning for not participating in violence, which included violence against the wicked, against enemies,<sup>1033</sup> and even violence done in self-protection, it also goes on to include the magistrate.

Christ was to be made king, but He fled and did not discern the ordinance of His Father. Thus we should also do as He did and follow after Him, and we shall not walk in darkness. For He Himself says: “Whoever would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” He Himself further forbids the violence of the sword when He says: “the princes of this world lord it over them etc., but among you it shall not be so.” Further Paul says, “Whom God has foreknown, the same he has also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son,” etc. Peter also says: “Christ has suffered (not ruled) and has left us an example, that you should follow after in his steps.”<sup>1034</sup>

The SC recognized, in other words, both interpersonal violence as well as that which we might describe as systemic violence.

The final article on “the oath” (article VII) highlights what we already noted above – to whom should followers of Jesus pledge allegiance? It was common practice in the 16<sup>th</sup> century for European cities to require an oath of loyalty from its citizens; often taking place in the city square. Typically included in these oaths was the promise to defend the city through militarily means should it come under attack.<sup>1035</sup> The SC’s article regarding “the oath” was, therefore, a direct response to this civic obligation – again challenging Christendom society and the Christian’s responsibility according to its assumed logic. Lois Barrett notes how “both the Augsburg Confession and the Second Helvetic Confession explicitly condemned the Anabaptists, in part, because of their refusal to take up arms in defence [sic] of the

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<sup>1032</sup> The SC elaborates on this further in its section “on the sword” (article VI).

<sup>1033</sup> This fed the revolutionary, dangerous, and perhaps treasonous concern about Anabaptists as they would not participate in defending land or kingdoms against the enemy, especially given that a significant concern in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was the threat of a Turkish invasion.

<sup>1034</sup> Yoder, *The Schleithem Confession*, 15.

<sup>1035</sup> Lois Y. Barrett, “The Fragmentation of the Church and Its Unity in Peacemaking: A Mennonite Perspective,” in *The Fragmentation of the Church and Its Unity in Peacemaking*, ed. Jeffrey Gros and John D. Rempel (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2001), 166.

state.”<sup>1036</sup> The foundational factor being: to whom would one ultimately pledge allegiance? the city/state (i.e., the magistrate) who requires its citizens to wield the sword in order to defend it, or Jesus Christ who taught his followers to love one’s enemies even if that should lead to one’s own death. The answer according to the SC was the latter; an answer that would see many Anabaptists perish as a result.

The SC was a significant signpost on the road of Anabaptist self-identity and self-understanding. The church came to be understood as an alternative community that sought to embody other principles and practices than those assumed in Christendom Europe. This alternative ecclesiological understanding and foundation proved to be one of the most significant traits of the Anabaptist movement. And this is important to highlight as many today (including many who are part of the Anabaptist/Mennonite community) have come to simply describe “peace” as one of the most prominent signifiers of the Anabaptist movement. And yet, as Snyder also notes, it was their ecclesiology that set Anabaptism apart from other reformers.<sup>1037</sup> Rather than continuing to operate according to the assumption that everyone in society was part of the church, thus continuing to operate according to Augustine’s *ecclesia invisibilis* (i.e., the church’s invisibility), Anabaptists sought to be a visible community that would live differently than “the world”. And this, as Walter Klaassen notes, proved to be revolutionary.

Anabaptists were denied the right to civil and religious liberty; we don’t need to look far for the reasons. Their views – the function of the state, of the oath, of violence, religious liberty and economics – were a threat to the established order. Kamen says in his book that they represented a nuisance but no threat on account of these views. The Reformers and the hierarchy knew better. They knew long before Münster that if these ideas spread and many people adopted them, Europe would fall into chaos, that is, that the whole established order would disintegrate. Anabaptists were viewed as social revolutionaries; essentially the identification was correct.<sup>1038</sup>

As Anabaptist self-identity continued to develop, several important features and practices emerged. We will not attempt to determine which features are the most

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<sup>1036</sup> Barrett, “The Fragmentation of the Church and Its Unity in Peacemaking: A Mennonite Perspective,” 166. Barrett continues by stating how “[i]n Strasbourg, many Anabaptists refused to swear oaths of allegiance to the city, required by law every January, because part of that oath was a commitment to defend the city militarily if necessary. Anabaptists refused to be magistrates, with the power of life and death over others; for this they were condemned by both the Roman Catholic church and the churches of the magisterial Reformation, and governmental powers were engaged to hunt down, torture, burn, or drown thousands of them during the sixteenth-century” (Ibid., 166).

<sup>1037</sup> Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 95.

<sup>1038</sup> Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (Waterloo, ON: Conrad Press, 1973), 62.

essential to Anabaptism.<sup>1039</sup> As a way to summarize Anabaptism as a faith movement we can offer the following observations as important characteristics through its emergent story, especially as they pertain to the larger focus of this work:

- Anabaptism was a faith movement that emerged from – and largely remained on – the margins of Christendom society. It therefore embraced an alternative understanding of and locale for power
- Anabaptism sought to read and take the Bible seriously for the way in which those within the church were to live. This was especially true of Jesus’ life and teachings. It provided (provides) the foundation in how Christians ought to live in relation to one another, to the world, and to God.
- Anabaptists sought to form communities that could serve as visible manifestations of God’s kingdom in the world. They embraced an “already but not yet” eschatological perspective.
- To be part of such a community required a conscious decision. Believers or adult baptism was (is) the outward symbol of this decision.<sup>1040</sup>

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<sup>1039</sup> Others have attempted this elsewhere. For example, Harold S. Bender, in his normative essay *The Anabaptist Vision*, published in 1944, points to three foundational features: discipleship, church as brotherhood, and an ethic of love and non-resistance (Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* [Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944], 20). Others, such as Arnold Snyder, have suggested that, although Bender’s account is fairly accurate, he failed to offer a sufficient account of the pneumatological foundation present among the early Anabaptists (see C. Arnold Snyder, “Bread, Not Stone: Refocusing an Anabaptist Vision,” *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 13, no. 1 [2012]). Besides there being significant similarities with other Reformers (e.g., the importance of the creeds, anti-sacramentalism, anticlericalism, authority of scripture, and salvation by grace through faith), Snyder suggests that other doctrinal emphases of the Anabaptists were: a pneumatological priority, which is also present in the reading and interpreting scripture (what Snyder describes as “Spirit and Letter”), a soteriology that also had to bear fruit, the combination of faith and works (i.e., discipleship), *gelassenheit* or a spirit of “self-yieldedness” towards one another, free will or conscientious decision making (e.g., baptism), an eschatological focus, an alternative ecclesiology, water baptism, the ban, the supper, and mutual aid (see Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 84-93).

Such attempts to provide a definitive definition of Anabaptism have led to substantial arguments in trying to determine what was *the* most important feature of the Anabaptist story or whether such features have been consistent throughout the Anabaptist continuum and history. Given how contextual Anabaptism was (and is) I am not convinced about the benefit of entering into such a debate. Can one successfully argue that discipleship, community, and/or non-resistance (Bender’s three key features) are more important than the Anabaptist pneumatological emphasis (Snyder) or its emphasis on scriptural authority or its eschatological vision (Finger)? I, rather, seek to demonstrate how there were several features that have come to be important, but that such features arise with different emphasis in response to the particular contextual realities in which such Anabaptist communities find themselves.

<sup>1040</sup> C.J. Dyck provides the following summary: “Baptism was a sign of turning from sin to a new life of obedience to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. It meant becoming part of a community of faith where love and mutual caring was given and received. This meant being willing to give and receive counsel (the ‘rule of Christ’ Matt. 18:15-18). Baptism was both a personal and a communal act.

- Anabaptists believed (believe) that the Holy Spirit is required in order to embody the ways of Jesus and to embody the traits of the kingdom of God (e.g., love, peace, justice, equality, egalitarianism, mutual aid) already now in this world.
- Choosing to become part of this community meant being willing to place the priorities of Jesus over those of the state. The church – as a visible manifestation of God’s kingdom – was to embody these priorities. Anabaptists did not assume that the church and state shared a common goal. Where a difference in mandate existed, Christians were called to live according to the ethic of Jesus rather than fulfilling duties of participating in state affairs that contradicted the ethic of Jesus.
- The above point also highlights the Christological emphasis within Anabaptism. As such, given that loyalty was first and foremost to Jesus and his ways as well as to the kingdom of God, Anabaptism proved to be politically threatening. This was (is) also evident in their renunciation of the use of violence.<sup>1041</sup>
- This fostered an alternative relationship – an alternative politic – among those that were part of the community as well with the authorities of both the state and other (magisterial) ecclesial bodies.<sup>1042</sup> Thus, Anabaptists believed that to be part of this community meant that one would be an active member in the redeeming and reconciling work of God’s kingdom; to be based on and reflect

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It signaled both a willingness to suffer for Christ’s sake and a joyful sharing of this faith with others” (Cornelius J. Dyck, *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism* [Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1995], 177).

<sup>1041</sup> Menno Simons, for example, wrote in 1552: “The Scriptures teach that there are two opposing princes and two opposing kingdoms: the one is the Prince of peace; the other the prince of strife. Each of these princes has his particular kingdom and as the prince is so is also the kingdom. The Prince of peace is Christ Jesus; his kingdom is the kingdom of peace, which is his church; his messengers are the messengers of peace; his Word is the word of peace; his body is the body of peace; his children are the seed of peace; and his inheritance and reward are the inheritance and reward of peace. In short, with this King, and in his kingdom and reign, it is nothing but peace. Everything that is seen, heard, and done is peace” (Menno Simons, “Reply to False Accusations,” as quoted in Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources*, Classics of the Radical Reformation [Kitchener, Ont. Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1981], 280).

<sup>1042</sup> Menno Simons is once again helpful as he states in 1539: “Therefore I and my brethren in the Lord desire nothing... than that we may to the honor of God so labor with his fallen city and temple and captive people according to the talent received of him, that we may rebuild that which is demolished, repair that which is damaged, and free those who are captives with the Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. And we would bring it back to its earlier estate, that is, in the freedom of the Spirit to the doctrine, sacraments, ceremonies, love and life of Christ Jesus and his holy apostles” (Menno Simons, “Teaching and Writing,” 1539, as quoted in Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources*, 341).

the alternative politic of God's kingdom on earth, one where peace and justice are but an eschatological sign of what is to come.<sup>1043</sup>

### *Anabaptism in the South African context*

Anabaptism has had a small but significant influence in South Africa. It has had its most significant influence among the theological and activist voices during the struggle against apartheid. According to many of those most directly involved, Anabaptist-Mennonite theology provided and modeled an alternative understanding in what it means to be the church in relation to “the powers”, and what it means to be a community that walked in solidarity with those who were experiencing oppression, walking with them in their struggle, while challenging violence and injustice in ways that demonstrated and bore witness to a path of peace and reconciliation.

As we have already seen in previous chapters, the South African ecclesial expression in relation to “the powers” has largely been understood and manifested through a Constantinian paradigm, seeing how “State Theology” and “Church Theology” are but two different sides of the same coin. The Anabaptist vision<sup>1044</sup> provided an alternative perspective: an understanding of the church as a social body led by a different political vision – that of God's kingdom. As such, the vision that Anabaptism offered in the South African context fed an alternative ecclesial imagination in how the church could, and should, respond to the injustice of apartheid and “the powers” that sought to conserve such a system. A significant element in how such an Anabaptist vision was embodied came via the lived witness of Mennonite work in the South(ern) African context. Mennonites are a denominational expression

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<sup>1043</sup> Menno Simmons, for example, states “True evangelical faith is of such a nature that it cannot rest... it clothes the naked; it feeds the hungry; it comforts the sorrowful; it shelters the destitute; it aids and comforts all who are depressed of heart; it does good to those who do it harm; it serves those who wrong it; it prays for those who persecute it; it teaches, admonishes, and judges us with the Word of the Lord; it seeks those who are lost; it binds up what is wounded; it heals the sick; it saves that which is strong; it has become all things to all people.... (Menno Simmons, excerpt from “Discipleship” in Dyck, *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism*, 88). I think it is safe to say that this statement has become one of the foundational statements with regards to the Anabaptist notion and understanding of faith.

<sup>1044</sup> The phrase “Anabaptist vision” refers to Anabaptist theology, story, and witness. It also speaks about the way in which Mennonites, as a historic denominational expression of Anabaptism, has been a witness to this vision. It encompasses and assumes the interconnectivity between theology and its lived expression. This is particularly true for how such a faith expression was viewed and understood in the South African context. It does not, in other words, simply refer to Bender's notion and depiction of 16<sup>th</sup> century Anabaptism.

whose roots lie in the Anabaptist movement. It therefore behooves us to look at the Mennonite witness in the South African context.

Anabaptist-Mennonite theology has never been very influential in the broader history of the Christian church.<sup>1045</sup> Nor has it tried to be. This was no different in South Africa during the struggle against apartheid. As we have already seen, other theological sources—for example, Black Theology, partly influenced by the U.S. civil rights struggle; or the Black Consciousness Movement, fed by Franz Fanon and Steve Biko; or the Confessional Church movement in Nazi Germany, in which Dietrich Bonhoeffer was an instrumental figure—all played a substantial role in feeding the South African imagination as people struggled against the injustice, the ongoing colonization, and the oppression of apartheid. These movements nurtured a vision of a just and equitable future to which all South Africans could belong. Jon Rudy, who was recruited by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) to write a history of MCC's involvement in South Africa, notes that, “. . . Mennonite work in South Africa is not a highly-visible part of this story. We went there to support and accompany people working for change.”<sup>1046</sup> For some of those advocates for change, however, Anabaptist-Mennonite theology became a valuable resource that fueled and continued to shape a theological imagination that challenged the unjust realities of apartheid, realities that had been justified theologically. Anabaptist-Mennonite theology not only offered another voice insisting that apartheid was not a social reality that God desires, but it also provided theological tools and resources to challenge and confront “the powers”—those political, cultural, and spiritual forces at the root of one of the most pervasive systemic manifestations of racism, injustice, and violence—that is, apartheid—in order to change the constructed social order.

We must, however, remember the Anabaptist-Mennonite contribution to the struggle against apartheid with appropriate caution. With the benefit of hindsight, the unjust nature and aims of apartheid have become increasingly evident. Apartheid was an all-encompassing system that sought to bring about racial segregation, or “separate development”. Today, for example, it is difficult to find anyone who admits to supporting or voting for the National Party – the South African political party that put

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<sup>1045</sup> As noted in the previous section Anabaptism has tended to exist on the margins of (Christendom) society.

<sup>1046</sup> Jon Rudy, "Mennonite Central Committee South Africa," *MCC Institutional Memory booklet* 5, no. 1 (1998): 3.

in place the rigid, ideological character and policies of apartheid. As the brutal reality of the injustice and oppression of apartheid has become clearer, virtually everyone wants to be known today for his or her involvement in the struggle against it. Yet it is historical fact that little of what could have been done at the time to oppose the injustice and oppression of apartheid was, in fact, actually done.

The story of Mennonite involvement in South Africa must therefore be remembered with humility – more could have and should have been done. The immense struggle and sacrifice of many other churches – with many leaders who struggled sacrificially against a system that sought to segregate and separate – must also be acknowledged. Mennonites did not initiate, nor were they a major component, in South Africa's emancipatory struggle. Indeed, their role was relatively minor. Mennonites in South Africa simply sought to walk with and be a support to those who were already struggling against an oppressive system. Mennonites worldwide were not then, nor are they now, fully committed to abolish their involvement in unjust and oppressive circumstances.

Nevertheless, Anabaptist-Mennonite theology did provide new tools, resources, and perspectives that fed an alternative imagination in South Africa; offering ways to challenge and confront “the powers” in order to change the constructed social order. Likewise, as this chapter will later highlight, Anabaptist-Mennonite theology continues to offer new tools and perspectives that can assist in reclaiming a Prophetic Theology in today's South African context.<sup>1047</sup>

## Mennonite Involvement in South Africa

Toward the latter half of the twentieth century, various voices—both within South Africa and internationally—were emerging in response to apartheid. Nationally, as the injustice of apartheid and its policies became more apparent, a growing number of individuals, churches, and organizations began to express their discontent, first with scattered cries, songs, and protests, and then with mounting theological confrontations against the apartheid system. In 1949 the Rosettenville

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<sup>1047</sup> The following section that explores Anabaptism in the South African context largely comes from a paper that I first had published as "The Mennonite Experience in South Africa: An Alternative Imagination," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89 (2015).



Conference voiced critiques of the system, followed by similar resolutions from the Cottesloe Consultation in 1960 in protest against the Sharpeville massacre earlier that same year. In 1968, the South African Council of Churches released “A Message to the People of South Africa” which rejected apartheid as a pseudo-gospel. At the same time, ongoing dissent expressed in Black Theology and the Black Consciousness movement, along with rising voices of the oppressed, eventually led to the *Kairos Document* in 1985, which may have been the sharpest critique directed at the church during apartheid.

In the 1960s international pressure also began to mount against apartheid. In 1961 South Africa was forced to remove its application to join the British Commonwealth as a republic because of its apartheid system.<sup>1048</sup> That same year, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) expelled South Africa from international soccer. In 1962, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution declaring apartheid to be in violation of South Africa’s obligations under the U.N. charter. Pressure against South Africa and its policy of apartheid continued through different sport associations. In 1964 South Africa was humiliatingly excluded from the Tokyo Olympics and in 1970 the International Olympic Committee extended South Africa’s ban, resulting in their exclusion from Olympic games from 1972 in Munich until 1996.<sup>1049</sup> Meanwhile, other groups exerted economic pressures through boycotts and disinvestment. Similar pressure arose theologically with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches declared apartheid a heresy and suspended the Dutch Reformed Church’s membership in 1982.

In the latter half of the twentieth century Mennonites also began to respond more intentionally to the situation in South Africa. Whereas their engagement in the 1950s and early 1960s had focused primarily on fact-finding and study, by the late 1960s Mennonites began to offer more direct support and expressions of solidarity. In 1968, for example, the Council of Mennonite Board Secretaries (COMBS), now known as the Council of International Ministries (CIM), approved a study assignment of southern Africa. Don Jacobs, representing Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions,

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<sup>1048</sup> South Africa was part of the Commonwealth since 1931, but because of South Africa’s move to become a republic, it had to reapply in order to remain part of the Commonwealth.

<sup>1049</sup> South African History Online, “Ioc Extends South Africa's Ban from Olympic Games,” [www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/ioc-extends-south-africa039s-ban-olympic-games](http://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/ioc-extends-south-africa039s-ban-olympic-games). Accessed Feb. 10, 2015.

and Jim Bertsche, of Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM), undertook this assignment in 1970. Their recommendation was for “involvement”:

While the evils of the apartheid system are clearly recognized and while desiring that this system be changed so that all men [sic] may be treated as people with God-given dignity where they are now oppressed, the authentic goals for Mennonite involvement are the encouragement of the growth and nurture of the Kingdom of Heaven within the situation, and authentic signs of the love of Christ in particular settings. This means that involvement shall produce Christian disciples who carry a concern for the total condition of man [sic] as did their Lord.<sup>1050</sup>

In the struggle against apartheid questions about the feasibility of peaceful change were always close to the surface. Mennonites pondered whether South Africans would welcome to their struggle outsiders who professed a commitment to peaceful responses to oppression.<sup>1051</sup> Nor was it always clear how solidarity should be expressed. The South African Council of Churches (SACC), for example, regularly called for help regarding developments within the “homelands” – small bits of land that were cordoned off for black tribal groups. Mennonites and their different agencies, however, were unsure as to whether participation in such assignments would simply make the overall unjust system of apartheid more palatable rather than expose the outright injustice of the system.<sup>1052</sup> Eventually a loose coalition of Mennonite agencies, including AIMM, Eastern Mennonite Mission (EMM), and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), drew up a plan of action. They would seek to:

1. place a “peace missionary” with the South African Council of Churches in Johannesburg;
2. place secondary school teachers in selected institutions where creative work was taking place in preparing for the future of South Africa;
3. engage in rural or agricultural work in the Transkei (what is now part of the Eastern Cape).<sup>1053</sup>

The SACC expressed particular interest in having Mennonite involvement in rural agricultural work as part of the rapidly growing self-sufficiency initiatives that emerged out of the Black Consciousness Movement.<sup>1054</sup>

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<sup>1050</sup> Jim Bertsche, *CIM/AIMM: A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace* (Elkhart, Indiana: Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, 1998), 445.

<sup>1051</sup> Robert Herr and Judy Zimmerman Herr, *Building Peace in South Africa: A Case Study of Mennonite Program* (New York, N. Y.: Oxford University Press, 2000), 61.

<sup>1052</sup> Herr and Herr, *Building Peace in South Africa*, 62.

<sup>1053</sup> Herr and Herr, *Building Peace in South Africa*, 62.

The issue that soon became apparent, however, was neither the Mennonite desire to support the struggle nor the desire to be incarnationally present with those struggling against apartheid but rather with the challenge of legal entry into South Africa. During apartheid the South African government became very suspicious about international involvement in the country, especially in the case of what they deemed to be progressive churches that opposed its policies. In the mid-1970s South African authorities twice denied visas when Mennonites attempted to place a “peace missionary” in Johannesburg.<sup>1055</sup> This meant that Mennonite participation in the struggle would have to be done on the edges of South Africa – from the nearby countries of Lesotho, Swaziland, and Botswana.

Given the above restrictions Mennonites began to work in Botswana in 1968 and in Swaziland shortly thereafter.<sup>1056</sup> In 1971-1972, James Juhnke, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) program director in Botswana, wrote a substantive study on South Africa, which became a benchmark for ongoing Mennonite thinking about involvement in South Africa.<sup>1057</sup> In 1973 Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM), a collaborative body of various Mennonite mission agencies, initiated an “exploratory ministry” in Lesotho and, two years later, began to work in Botswana as well.

According to Mennonite workers who lived in Lesotho, Swaziland, and Botswana during the 1970s and 1980s the challenge of working in South Africa started with the logistics of border crossings and attaining visas. South African authorities, they recalled, frequently denied them entry for two reasons:

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<sup>1054</sup> As this work has already demonstrated in chapter three, Black Consciousness was (is) a movement that sought to demonstrate and believe in the inherent good that exists in black people’s blackness. Whereas the colonial legacy along with the apartheid system degraded black people because of their blackness, which inevitably led to negative self-perceptions and self-esteem, the Black Consciousness movement sought to reverse this logic and see the inherent dignity and good that exists within each black person. Allan Boesak sums up it up as follows: “Black Consciousness may be described as the awareness of black people that their humanity is constituted by their blackness. It means that black people are no longer ashamed that they are black, that they have a black history and a black culture distinct from the history and culture of white people. It means that blacks are determined to be judged no longer by, and to adhere no longer to white values. It is an attitude, a way of life.” (Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 1). Steve Biko, the father of the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa, comments about the nature of Black Consciousness as follows: “What Black Consciousness seeks to do is to produce at the output end of the process real black people who do not regard themselves as appendages to white society.” (Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 53). Biko also states: “Black Consciousness is in essence the realisation by the black man . . . to rally together with brothers . . . and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the ‘normal’ which is white” (Ibid., 55).

<sup>1055</sup> Herr and Herr, *Building Peace in South Africa*, 63.

<sup>1056</sup> Herr and Herr, *Building Peace in South Africa*, 62.

<sup>1057</sup> Herr and Herr, *Building Peace in South Africa*, 62.

1. The government's uneasiness about Mennonites' historical connections with Russia. This fed a general fear of communism – the apartheid government's ideological nemesis. Even the name "Mennonite *Central* Committee", for example, was viewed with suspicion because Communist governments had centralized forms of government.
2. Mennonite interest in peace, as the apartheid government soon learned, was closely connected to questions of justice. And questions of justice resulted in highlighting the inequalities that inevitably arose from the apartheid system and its racial segregation.

Many Mennonites who were working in southern Africa and wanted to enter South Africa were either not allowed entry or were granted visas encumbered with heavy restrictions – for example, a sixteen-hour transit visa that allowed the holder to drive from one border country to another.<sup>1058</sup> Serious consequences awaited the holder found to be in breach of these restrictions.

Mennonites did, however, find ways of getting involved in the struggle against apartheid. In 1976 the South African government, in pursuit of its policy of "separate development", created "independent homelands" to help "develop" those who were "non-white". The apartheid government created tracts of land, otherwise known as "Bantustans", that were designated as independent homelands for "non-white" people of a particular ethnic, cultural, or linguistic background. Although the creation of these bantustans was a feeble attempt to "accommodate" and "develop" indigenous South Africans in ways that actually promoted the apartheid system, the new policy did open a door for Mennonites who had previously not been allowed to live in South Africa to move into these newly created Bantustans. Dave Neufeld became the first MCC appointee to arrive in one of these independent homelands, a territory known as the Transkei (now part of the Eastern Cape). Neufeld was followed shortly thereafter by Robert (Bob) and Judy Zimmerman Herr, who served in the region as MCC country representatives.<sup>1059</sup> In 1978 Tim and Suzanne Lind replaced the Zimmerman

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<sup>1058</sup> A story is told, for example, of one Mennonite family, working in Lesotho in the early 1980s, which was denied a visa because their 2-year-old daughter was declared to be a terrorist.

<sup>1059</sup> Bertsche, *CIM/AIMM: A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace*, 509.

Herrs and were placed in Umtata (now Mthatha), where they served as consultants to programs operated by the local Council of Churches.

Throughout these early years, Mennonites found ways to support various rural and agricultural programs. Mennonites also financially supported several SACC programs: for example, South Africa's conscientious objection support groups for white men who were unwilling to serve in the military of the apartheid government; the Dependent's Conference, a program that supported the families of political prisoners who were detained; the Relocations Projects, which supported black families who were forcefully removed from their homes or land; and the council's Justice and Reconciliation Department.<sup>1060</sup>

In the 1980s, discussions surrounding the meaning of "peace", and the question of whether violence could ever be justified, dominated the life of many of the churches as they sought ways to resist a system whose unjust assumptions and practices were becoming increasingly obvious, especially for whites. The government, on the other hand, was increasingly willing to exert more force and violence in its efforts to sustain the apartheid system.

During this decade of struggle and repression Mennonite travel and movement within South Africa was often quite restricted.<sup>1061</sup> Thus, Mennonite involvement was largely limited to financial funding for particular, specialized programs.<sup>1062</sup> At the same time, Mennonite workers, both through MCC and different mission agencies working through AIMM, were never far from immigrants and refugees who fled South Africa to the neighboring countries or territories of Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, and the Transkei. Robert Herr and Judy Zimmerman Herr note that "the fact that Mennonites were present through this time [in the 1980s] did much to

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<sup>1060</sup> Herr and Herr, *Building Peace in South Africa*, 64.

<sup>1061</sup> Herr and Herr, *Building Peace in South Africa*, 65.

<sup>1062</sup> Such funding, for example, provided: 1) a staff position in the SACC Justice and Reconciliation Department. Later, Mennonite funding supported the salary of the director of this department who coordinated a network of field workers throughout the country; 2) the Dependent's Conference program; 3) a staff position, and later two more, in the International Fellowship of Reconciliation South African office that opened in 1984, which led trainings in nonviolent tactics for social change and worked in the fight against military conscription; 4) continued support for the conscientious objector's program that was gaining momentum throughout the 1980's; 5) rural and agricultural programs largely in the Transkei; 6) staff and student exchanges between Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and Federal Theological Seminary (FedSem), which was one of the theological training facilities of English-speaking churches for the ordination of black candidates. FedSem was one of the hubs of Black Theology; 7) and the Servanthood Sabbaticals program where church workers from South Africa who were heavily involved in the struggle against apartheid through nonviolent social action were able to have a respite from the South African situation while also sharing their story with others outside of South Africa. See Herr and Herr, *Building Peace in South Africa*, 66.

establish credibility with churches and partners in South Africa. Mennonites were known as an outside group that did not run away when things got rough and as people who were willing to stay and identify with the local residents in their struggle.”<sup>1063</sup> As one local activist and African National Congress (ANC) operative in the 1980s said, “If I ever need to flee South Africa, and go into exile in Lesotho or some other place, I would probably feel compelled to tell Mennonites to do the same. But as long as I am here, struggling in this context, I want you here working with me.”<sup>1064</sup>

### Affirmation of the Mennonite Identity and its theological perspectives

Mennonite involvement in South Africa became known especially for its commitment to peace, justice, and reconciliation through nonviolent means, its willingness to be present with those who were suffering—even if that might, and sometimes did, bring suffering onto themselves, and its distinctive understanding of the role and identity of the church. In particular, Mennonite theological perspectives on peace, with its intimate connection to justice, and its understanding of the church as an alternative community offered another perspective in how Christians could confront and challenge “the powers” and work to change the socially constructed order of apartheid.

#### 1. Theological Perspectives on Peace—The “Politics of Jesus”

During the 1960s and 1970s, the apartheid government introduced and intensified its practices of conscription whereby all young white men were required to serve for two years in the South African Defense Force. At first, no legal options existed for conscientious objection to serving in the military. The military was the force, both figuratively and literally, upon which the government relied to maintain “order” within the country. The apartheid regime saw this as necessary, especially since one of the tactics used by black activists in opposing the apartheid regime was to make townships “ungovernable”. Thus, a military presence in the townships became a regular and ongoing reality.

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<sup>1063</sup> Herr and Herr, *Building Peace in South Africa*, 70.

<sup>1064</sup> Rudy, “Mennonite Central Committee South Africa,” 1. The many people with whom we have come into contact in our time in South Africa have underscored this affirmation.

All young white men in South Africa faced this requirement to serve in the military. Both the government and the broader white society regarded military service as a straightforward expectation and duty. “It is not an exaggeration,” argued Nic Borain, the national organizer for the End Conscription Campaign, “to say that the South African Defense Force is everywhere. It’s in the white schools and the black schools. It’s in the universities. It’s in the streets, in the media, it’s a symbol in advertising. It’s in Angola, but most of all it is in our heads.”<sup>1065</sup> The apartheid government was quite adept at depicting this responsibility as essential in protecting the country from communists and anarchists. In 1976, P. W. Botha, who was then South Africa’s defense minister and who would later become president, declared: “If we want to oppose the forces of revolution, anarchy and chaos, we must begin with our young people at school.”<sup>1066</sup> As conscripts, all young white men were taught that being good, responsible citizens demanded their readiness to defend the nation against forces that would send the country, along with its comfort and privilege, into a downward spiral of inevitable violence. The irony, of course, is that the government did not see its own policies and social system as violent.

Over time, however, the manifestly unjust nature of apartheid and its laws became apparent. Increasingly, young men who faced the realities of conscription began to question whether they wanted to serve in the military force that maintained and imposed the injustice and violence of apartheid. Toward the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s, a growing number of young men decided that they could not conscientiously serve in the military for this reason.<sup>1067</sup>

Mennonites increasingly became involved with these young conscientious objectors. Becoming a C.O. was not an easy step. It often meant being ostracized by relatives, since many families did not understand why one would not serve and protect their country and way of being. According to a Catholic summary of the war resistance movement in South Africa, “Even liberally-minded people, and sometimes friends and family, regarded them as unpatriotic, cowards, or simply foolish to make

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<sup>1065</sup> *Out of Step: War Resistance in South Africa*, (London, UK: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1989), 20.

<sup>1066</sup> *Out of Step*, 20.

<sup>1067</sup> The exact number remains unknown, since the South African Defense Force and the apartheid government would not report on these numbers out of fear that it would feed support for anti-military and anti-apartheid movements. They likely numbered in the thousands.

such a sacrifice.”<sup>1068</sup> Furthermore, many South Africans regarded them as a threat to social and political order. As more young men became C.O.’s, the government eventually made some allowances, mostly to convince other nations who were increasing their pressure on the apartheid government about the inhumane character of its policies, that it was indeed reasonable. Rather than simply imprisoning them, as had been the case for the early C.O.’s in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in 1983 the apartheid government began to grant C.O. status to applicants who were persuasive in their appeal. Rather than spending two years serving in the military, a C.O. who had been granted that status would spend six years either in prison, if he was deemed a political C.O., or in community service, if deemed a religious C.O.

In this process, which required applicants to articulate and justify their reasoning for not serving in the military, many C.O.’s encountered Anabaptist-Mennonite theology. For these young white men, Anabaptist-Mennonite perspectives on peace expressed in the writings of Mennonite authors such as John Howard Yoder, Donald Kraybill, Alan Kreider, and others provided support and resources that helped them to articulate shared convictions:

- a) their unwillingness to participate in violence to maintain order and control;
- b) that violence would not bring about the lasting peace and the potential for reconciliation they desired;
- c) that Jesus and the social ethic that he embodied was contrary to much of what they saw embodied within the South African society through apartheid;
- d) that the system in which they were caught was violent in its very nature, which required alternative peaceful approaches to bringing about the social change and transformation needed at the most fundamental and systemic level within South Africa.

Many South Africans who were conscientized about the injustice of the South African social system were quite skeptical about concepts such as “peace” and “reconciliation” since these words were also used by many white South Africans to

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<sup>1068</sup> *Out of Step*, 82.



maintain an unjust and oppressive system (as noted in chapter two with the KD's criticism of Church Theology). Even though many whites in South Africa were quick to insist that violence, when used in opposition to the state, could not be justified, they failed to recognize the inherent violence of the system of apartheid and the social norms of white South African society that sustained the apartheid system. Thus, opponents of apartheid initially regarded the language of peace and reconciliation with suspicion.

But Anabaptist-Mennonite understandings of peace proved to be different in several ways. John de Gruchy, one of South Africa's most renowned theologians, recognized that Anabaptism provided a compelling alternative to some of the prevailing theologies present in the South African context, especially those pertaining to just war and just revolution.<sup>1069</sup> "Perhaps the fact that the dominant theological traditions in South Africa have simply taken the just war position for granted," he noted, "has led us to the unwarranted assumption that there is no alternative theological position except that of a just revolution."<sup>1070</sup> The Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of peace was especially distinctive in that it demonstrated a historical willingness to suffer in the pursuit of peace, rather than to accept a position of privilege while others suffered.

Second, many in the struggle against apartheid came to appreciate the consistency of the Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of peace—recourse to violence was always wrong, both when a regime sought to maintain power and control in defense of an unjust and oppressive system as well as in violent struggle against an oppressive regime. Robert Herr and Judy Zimmerman Herr recalled a pastor friend stating:

My quarrel isn't with the Mennonites. My quarrel is with the churches that are suddenly changing their minds. After years of talking about just wars, when blacks want to fight they suddenly turn around and want to talk about peace. With you Mennonites, pacifism has integrity. You have talked about peace for years, and have on occasion suffered for it.<sup>1071</sup>

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<sup>1069</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 131.

<sup>1070</sup> John de Gruchy, "Radical Peace-Making, the Challenge of Some Anabaptists," in *Theology and Violence, the South African Debate*, ed. Charles Villa-Vicencio (C. Skotaville, Johannesburg, 1987), 175.

<sup>1071</sup> Herr and Herr, *Building Peace in South Africa*, 68.

Third, the Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of peace was inseparable from a commitment to justice—peace would not come about without the presence of justice for all. In contrast to other voices, for Mennonites peace and reconciliation necessarily included a commitment to justice.

The Anabaptist-Mennonite vision of peace provided an alternative vision of right relationships with others and with God. It pointed toward a distinct form of politics, the politics of Jesus<sup>1072</sup>—a way of living that confronted those who saw themselves as disciples of Jesus to reflect on how they should live with their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, even if they were of a different race. This affected the way in which Christians would structure their social lives, including the way they would allow their lives to be structured in the world. In short, it provided an alternative political vision, particularly about what a commitment to Jesus and his countercultural kingdom entailed as it challenged the very structure of “the powers” that sought power, authority, and dominion over others.<sup>1073</sup> As John de Gruchy concluded about Anabaptists (and Quakers):

For them, the message of the cross is not simply about what God might have done in and through the death of Christ, but on the *way* of the cross as the way in which we participate in God’s work of reconciliation and redemption. Jesus’ servanthood, his teaching about non-violence, his willingness to suffer for the sake of others, the inclusiveness of his embrace, all finding expression in the Sermon on the Mount, provide the basis for our participation in God’s reconciling work.<sup>1074</sup>

## 2. The Church as an Alternative Community

Anabaptist-Mennonite emphasis, and lived witness, regarding the church as an alternative community has also been a valuable perspective in South Africa. David Bosch—another significant South African theologian and world-renowned missiologist who was deeply influenced by his relationship with Mennonites—made this point the centerpiece of his theology.<sup>1075</sup>

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<sup>1072</sup> This obviously refers to John Howard Yoder’s famous book, which was quite influential in the South African context.

<sup>1073</sup> For an interesting look and study at some of the similarities and differences between South African “third way theology” as compared to Anabaptism, see Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 131-35.

<sup>1074</sup> John W. De Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 63.

<sup>1075</sup> Cobus van Wyngaard, “The Public Role of the Christian Community in the Work of David Bosch,” *Missionalia* 39, no. 1 & 2 (2011). See also J. N. J. Kritzing and W. A. Saayman, *David J. Bosch: Prophetic Integrity, Cruciform Praxis* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2011), 77; and

Bosch understood the life and character of the church as an alternative community that reflected the person and teachings of Jesus. He argued that instead of simply mirroring the politics of governing bodies or political liberation movements this peculiar community would seek to embody the politics of Jesus.<sup>1076</sup> Although Bosch assumed that the politics of Jesus would align themselves more with those seeking liberation from oppression, since Jesus aligned himself deeply with those who were oppressed, the form of that message of liberation was quite different from the standard assumptions of most other political liberation movements. For Bosch the radical transformation of society that Jesus promises differs from the “Zealot option,” which, although it also sought to bring about change in society, relied on the same violent methods used by the oppressors. Put differently, the Zealot option did not demonstrate a radically new transformation of society but rather a new portrayal of an ongoing oppressive, violent form of life in society.

In the context of apartheid South Africa Bosch recognized the oppressive nature of apartheid rule, which he critiqued sharply. Yet he also saw the perceived goal of “prophetic theology”, or liberation theology, which he argued sought a “mere change of government”, as equally unhelpful. Both approaches, he argued, continued to embrace the use of force and violence as necessary. Jesus and his politics, by contrast, rejected the use of force in the transformation of society. Indeed, it was his refusal to use force, thus relinquishing the priority of effectiveness in favor of faithfulness that made Jesus’ forms of politics truly “radical”.<sup>1077</sup>

In order for the church to be an “alternative community”, Bosch believed that it must be visible and distinct as it carried out its role and mission. He, for example, described several unique elements that the church is called to fulfill. One such calling is for the church to pray for the world. But, in order for the church to truly become an intercessor for the world, it needs to become what it prays for.<sup>1078</sup> Another calling of the church is to be a prophetic voice in society. But in order to be such a prophetic

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Cobus van Wyngaard, "The Church as Alternative Community and the Struggle for Liberation in the Work of David Bosch," *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 54, no. 3 & 4 (2013).

<sup>1076</sup> Here we again hear Yoderian overtones, a reflection of the friendship Bosch had with John Howard Yoder.

<sup>1077</sup> van Wyngaard, "The Church as Alternative Community and the Struggle for Liberation in the Work of David Bosch," 89.

<sup>1078</sup> van Wyngaard, "The Church as Alternative Community and the Struggle for Liberation in the Work of David Bosch," 93.

voice, it needs to tangibly reflect the community the prophetic message voices.<sup>1079</sup> In short, the church must embody now the values to which it calls society to embrace.<sup>1080</sup> In Bosch's words, "the 'people of God' is a 'pilgrim people', 'called out' of the world. 'Foreignness is an element of its constitution.' 'It is called to flesh out, already in the here and now, something of the conditions which are to prevail in God's reign.'"<sup>1081</sup> Thus, in embracing this calling—a calling that requires becoming a visible community that embodies Jesus' form of politics—the church becomes an alternative community in the world.

Bosch grounded his understanding of the "alternative community in the life of Jesus," and he portrayed Jesus "as providing an alternative upon which to base the choices available to society."<sup>1082</sup> He explains how he was influenced to think in this way:

Perhaps it would be correct to say that, in the course of time, the essence of my thinking in this area has crystallised in the concept of the church as the "alternative community." The expression was not coined by me; it originated, I think, in American Mennonite circles. What I have attempted to do—not very successfully, I am afraid, judging by the reaction, particularly in the Afrikaans Reformed Churches!—was to build on and develop further the intrinsic similarities that I believe exist between Reformed and Anabaptist ecclesiologies.<sup>1083</sup>

Bosch's understanding of an "alternative community" put him in an uncomfortable position in the context of South Africa. He was highly critical of the apartheid government and system. Yet, he was also an Afrikaner and member of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK), the largest of the white Dutch Reformed churches in South Africa, which, as we have seen, theologically substantiated and justified apartheid and its policies. Not surprisingly, he did not receive a lot of support from his own church community for his vision of the church as an alternative community. And yet, even though Bosch was highly critical of his own people and of apartheid and in this way was closer to prophetic theology, he was also concerned

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<sup>1079</sup> van Wyngaard, "The Church as Alternative Community and the Struggle for Liberation in the Work of David Bosch," 93.

<sup>1080</sup> van Wyngaard, "The Church as Alternative Community and the Struggle for Liberation in the Work of David Bosch," 93.

<sup>1081</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 19th ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 373-74.

<sup>1082</sup> van Wyngaard, "The Public Role of the Christian Community in the Work of David Bosch," 156.

<sup>1083</sup> David Bosch, *The Church as the Alternative Community* (Potchefstroom, South Africa: Instituut vir Reformatoriese Studie, 1982), 8.

about and could not justify the use of force in challenging the apartheid government. This was the primary reason why he felt he could not sign the *Kairos Document*. The KD, according to Bosch's reading, supported and justified the violence of uMkhonto weSizwe, the military wing of the African National Congress that was established in 1961, along with other forms of violence in response to the violence of the apartheid government. Bosch "felt that *Kairos* was skirting uncomfortably close to a one-sided condonation [sic] of a violent solution."<sup>1084</sup> Bosch's problem with the KD, according to Cobus van Wyngaard, was "similar to the difference between Jesus and the Zealots which he [Bosch] adopted from Yoder and Cullmann in the 1970s, focusing on what he interpreted as *Kairos*' exclusive emphasis on political liberation and the legitimization of violence."<sup>1085</sup>

Bosch clearly did not support the injustice of the apartheid system. But neither did he support or justify the use of force many assumed would be needed to bring about the liberation for which he too longed. For Bosch, in order for true liberation to take root, the church needed to focus on embodying its calling, which, when grounded in the life, teachings, and politics of Jesus, would visibly distinguish the church as an alternative community. Johannes (Klippiess) Kritzing and Willem Saayman suggest that Bosch's approach was truly prophetic—"clearly opposed to the oppression happening in South Africa—although choosing a different approach than liberation theologies."<sup>1086</sup>

Others, however, critiqued Bosch and his understanding of the church as "alternative community" because of the South African church's deep division during apartheid. Klaus Nürnberger, for example, argued that one could not get away from this reality.<sup>1087</sup> And yet Nürnberger argued that this division did provide an opportunity to "suffer" each other in that those within the church could learn to confront each other in an attempt to sort through their differences. This was the logic of the NIR. Thus, some of Bosch's critics asked "Where can one find this alternative

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<sup>1084</sup> Kritzing and Saayman, *David J. Bosch*, 98.

<sup>1085</sup> van Wyngaard, "The Church as Alternative Community and the Struggle for Liberation in the Work of David Bosch," 91.

<sup>1086</sup> Kritzing and Saayman, *David J. Bosch*, 186-89.

<sup>1087</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 68.

community?” Anthony Balcomb argued that Bosch’s ecclesiology succumbed to the fallacy of the apolitical position of Church Theology.<sup>1088</sup>

As is often the case with prophets and prophetic voices, neither the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) nor the broader Afrikaner cultural family embraced Bosch and his theology since it fundamentally challenged that which they constructed and supported. It threatened their history, identity, and way of life.<sup>1089</sup> Bosch and his work was, however, deeply influential for those who also questioned and sought to challenge the apartheid system. In many ways he has been considered as a theological pioneer who provided an alternative theology, one heavily influenced by Anabaptism, in how to respond to the South African context during apartheid. Both he and John de Gruchy were very influential in exploring alternative theological responses which sought to both challenge the apartheid system while at the same time trying to step out of the cycle of violence.

#### Anabaptism in context

This story of Mennonite involvement in South Africa, in its accompaniment and solidarity with those who were oppressed and suffering under apartheid, demonstrates how Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and witness provided another resource that helped South Africans imagine both how to respond to the unjust nature of apartheid and imagine another possibility. John de Gruchy and David Bosch, two leading South African theologians who were influenced by Anabaptist-Mennonite thinking had a substantial impact in shaping many young students during this tumultuous time in South Africa.<sup>1090</sup> The possibilities they fostered shaped an alternative vision for how people of different racial backgrounds could come together and witness to a social reality other than that enforced by the apartheid system. Likewise, Mennonite presence in predominantly black areas (especially that which was the Transkei) also offered an alternative witness to the apartheid regime.

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<sup>1088</sup> Balcomb, *Third Way Theology*, 71. Balcomb continued his critique by inferring that Bosch and other “third way” protagonists sought to avoid issues of power and power struggles (see *Ibid.*, 74). For this reason Balcomb argued that “third way” theology was an endorsement of liberalism, a political policy that sought moderation (*Ibid.*, 75).

<sup>1089</sup> For a more detailed description about this see Kritzing and Saayman, *David J. Bosch*, 65-86.

<sup>1090</sup> David Bosch taught at the University of South Africa (UNISA); John de Gruchy taught at the University of Cape Town (UCT).

Mennonite involvement helped to nurture such an imagination whereby an alternative reality of peace, justice, and reconciliation, rather than oppression and violence, is made not only possible but is, in fact, clearly conveyed as the hope and will of God. It helped foster ways in which people could:

1. become an alternative community seeking reconciliation and overcoming the division brought about through apartheid;
2. challenge the powers in ways that called the violent and oppressive policies of apartheid into question;
3. find ways to respond and challenge the unjust nature of the powers without continuing the cycle of violence;
4. recognize that the cycle of violence would not allow for true reconciliation.

Although this new theological vision did not result in the creation of Anabaptist or Mennonite churches, it found practical expression in a myriad of ways, including interracial Bible studies and conferences, strong support for young whites seeking Conscientious Objector status, the emergence of interracial churches, whites living in predominantly black areas, and a deepening commitment to expressions of Christianity that challenged the dominant South African Constantinian imagination.

Anabaptism in the South African context is often depicted through the experience of Mennonites and their involvement during the years of resistance to apartheid.<sup>1091</sup> These descriptions often include elements such as:

- being a communal people;
- being a people who walk in solidarity with those who are oppressed;
- being a people who pursue peace, justice, and reconciliation even if that leads to discomfort and persecution;
- being a people who understand the church as an alternative community composed of people who have made the voluntary

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<sup>1091</sup> This is based on my own experience and reflection based on our (mine and my family's) seven years living in South Africa as Mennonite missionaries.

decision to walk in ways that are based on Jesus' life and teachings;

- being a community in which we seek to demonstrate the alternative politic and nature of the kingdom of God in the here and now, being witnesses of peace and reconciliation within society.<sup>1092</sup>

### *In search of the prophetic: Anabaptist perspectives that can help re-claim a Prophetic Theology*

The above concluding experiential descriptions about Anabaptism in the South African context demonstrate ways in which an Anabaptist perspective may help to reclaim and, more importantly, reflect the presence of a Prophetic Theology in the South African context. The astute reader will no doubt already see significant overlap between Anabaptism and Liberation or Prophetic Theology.<sup>1093</sup> Both desire to dismantle and overcome the powers of oppression and injustice so that people may live rightly – in right relationship – with one another. Indeed this is the cornerstone of *shalom*. Perry Yoder describes this desire well: "... shalom, biblical peace, is squarely against injustice and oppression. Indeed, ... shalom demands a transforming of unjust social and economic orders."<sup>1094</sup> This is a perspective that both Prophetic Theology in the South African context and Anabaptism share.

And yet, although there is significant overlap, there are also some differences. Chapter four and five demonstrated how Prophetic Theology as a communal embodiment of an alternative politic dissipated after the demise of apartheid. The rest of this chapter will focus on three particular Anabaptist characteristics that can assist the church in South Africa reclaim its prophetic witness. The first characteristic is

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<sup>1092</sup> This depiction, however, raises the question as to whether or not Mennonites themselves, especially Mennonites in North America as most of the Mennonite experience in the South African context came through Mennonite mission agencies, remember or recognize these characteristics as part of their own faith identity. Do contemporary Mennonites continue to seek ways of living according to these values? Do they still form an essential part of their identity? These would be worthwhile questions to explore.

<sup>1093</sup> It is not an accident that Christopher Rowland, Dean Ireland's Professor of the Exegesis of Holy Scripture in the University of Oxford, describes how his encounter with Anabaptism coincided with his conversion to liberation theology (Rowland, "Anabaptism and Radical Christianity," 550).

<sup>1094</sup> Yoder, *Shalom*, 5.



embracing a deeper eschatological vision. The second, which stems from the first, is embodying an alternative understanding of power. And the third is to embrace an alternative ecclesiological understanding that seeks to embody the first two characteristics. These three traits can feed a prophetic imagination. Indeed, as we will see, these traits are not foreign to the expression of Prophetic Theology in the South African context. In many ways – especially the last two points – this was embodied in South Africa’s prophetic tradition. And yet, as this work has already demonstrated, Prophetic Theology, because it did not emphasize or perhaps even recognize these particular characteristics, dissipated after the demise of apartheid. It no longer held onto that which made it prophetic. This chapter will then end by providing two examples where such a prophetic witness is being embodied.

#### 1) An Anabaptist Eschatological perspective – the continuing struggle

In 1973, John Howard Yoder published an essay entitled “Exodus and Exile: the two faces of liberation” where he wrestles with the upsurge of rhetoric and theological emphasis that arose in the late 1960s centred on liberation as the purpose of God. This was a time of significant upheaval, especially in the “developing world” at that time – Latin America, Africa, and Asia – as they challenged and struggled against unjust structures and the colonial powers that introduced them. Yoder critically analyzes some of the rhetoric and the theological justifications offered during this time. He asked whether the “liberation fronts” were really liberating? Yoder raised this question as the World Council of Churches was in the process of exploring how to relate to as well as how or whether it should support liberation efforts, which were also engaged militarily. The “Program to Combat Racism,” which began in 1969, was one such effort through which the WCC supported the SACC as well as providing financial resources to liberation movements such as the ANC with no strings attached.<sup>1095</sup> Yoder’s question was not whether liberation should be pursued but rather through what means does liberation come about?

The WCC along with much of Liberation Theology placed significance on the Exodus event as a theological paradigm that lent support to an emphasis on liberation.

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<sup>1095</sup> Claude Emerson Welch, “Mobilizing Morality: The World Council of Churches and Its Programme to Combat Racism, 1969-1994,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (2001): 866.

In his essay, Yoder offers several observations and words of caution; caution not in questioning the desire for liberation as he too highlights the centrality of such an emphasis in the biblical story. Instead he offers caution in that much of this theology legitimized and justified the use of violence in the pursuit of liberation; and the use of the Exodus story furthered this tendency. As such, Yoder offers some observations regarding the Exodus and how it is, or should be, interpreted should we indeed use it for theological justification.

Yoder's first observation is that the Exodus event is not a program but a miracle. The Exodus itself, arriving through the Hebraic experience of Holy War, was not a rationally planned and programmatically executed military operation.<sup>1096</sup> Indeed, the combatants were not the Hebrew people but JHWH himself.<sup>1097</sup> This leads to the second observation. The Exodus, which literally means "liberation",<sup>1098</sup> was an act whereby the Hebrew people "went out", in trust (which sometimes waned) in JHWH. "The old tyranny," notes Yoder, "is destroyed not by beating it at its own game of intrigue and assassination, but by the way the presence of the independent counter community (and its withdrawal) provokes Pharaoh to overreach himself."<sup>1099</sup> This, argues Yoder as he offers his third observation, demonstrates that the Exodus event was not a beginning but rather a culmination. Even prior to Moses and the liberative vision offered to the Hebrew people was an oppressed community that affirmed its identity, belonging, and faith in JHWH. "Moses would not have recognized his mandate, and his brethren would not have heard him, if there had not been a prior common history of recital amidst and despite the bondage. *Goshen is prior to Exodus.*"<sup>1100</sup> Put differently, a story and peoplehood, which included the recognition that bondage and slavery was a perversion of God's original intent, was necessary even prior to the Exodus.<sup>1101</sup> Furthermore, in responding to Mr. Poikail John George who made the broad claim that "the cries of God's people everywhere... has reached the ears of the Lord...", Yoder observes that in the story of the Exodus, which is the experience of one oppressed and wandering minority group, "the people of God" does

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<sup>1096</sup> Yoder, "Exodus and Exile," 299-300.

<sup>1097</sup> Yoder, "Exodus and Exile," 300.

<sup>1098</sup> Yoder, "Exodus and Exile," 300.

<sup>1099</sup> Yoder, "Exodus and Exile," 300.

<sup>1100</sup> Yoder, "Exodus and Exile," 301. Emphasis original.

<sup>1101</sup> Yoder, "Exodus and Exile," 301.

not refer to everybody.<sup>1102</sup> It refers, rather, to a specific faith group whose belief and trust was in JHWH.

To transpose the motif of liberation out of that distinct historical framework and thereby also away from the distinct historical identity of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, into some kind of general theistic affirmation of liberation, is to separate the biblical message from its foundation. There exists a liberation message only because of the particularity of the God of the fathers; Jews and Christians cannot talk confidently about liberation except in that connection.<sup>1103</sup>

This does not negate the universal intent – the desire that everyone or “the people” may be liberated. But the cry is not decontextualized from the particular faith community and its story. Thus, God’s liberation has as its base a specific story whereby the liberation event of Exodus is but a continuation of God’s presence as well as the people’s trust in and depiction of their God. “Thus peoplehood is not the product of liberation; peoplehood with a history and a trust in the God who has led the fathers is prior to liberation.”<sup>1104</sup>

Yoder also observes that just as important as the liberation event of Exodus was, the reason and purpose for which the Hebrew people were liberated was equally as important – or perhaps more. The purpose was to eventually enter into a covenant with their God, seeking to embody God’s will as offered through the law. And yet, because of the people’s impatience in accepting Aaron’s offerings rather than the Torah that Moses would eventually offer, thereby consolidating and forming the Israel community, Sinai becomes the first “fall” of Israel.<sup>1105</sup> In this way the Sinai event does not become liberation but a new form of enslavement and bondage in the desert.<sup>1106</sup> Thus Yoder notes: “Historically Exodus was the prerequisite of Sinai, but morally it is the other way ‘round. Liberation is *from* bondage and *for* covenant, and *what for* matters more than *what from*.”<sup>1107</sup> Liberation, in other words, has its post-requisites just as much as its pre-requisites.<sup>1108</sup> This, for Yoder, is the biggest dilemma: that many Christians “have borrowed from the Bible an imagery or *language* of liberation, but have avoided learning from the biblical story anything

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<sup>1102</sup> Yoder, “Exodus and Exile,” 303.

<sup>1103</sup> Yoder, “Exodus and Exile,” 303.

<sup>1104</sup> Yoder, “Exodus and Exile,” 303.

<sup>1105</sup> Yoder, “Exodus and Exile,” 304.

<sup>1106</sup> Yoder, “Exodus and Exile,” 304.

<sup>1107</sup> Yoder, “Exodus and Exile,” 304.

<sup>1108</sup> Yoder, “Exodus and Exile,” 304.

about the meaning of liberation.”<sup>1109</sup> And here it is worth quoting Yoder extensively as it sets the stage for the rest of the chapter:

The *form* of liberation in the biblical witness is not the guerilla campaign against an oppressor culminating in his assassination and military defeat, but the creation of a confessing community which is viable without or against the force of the state, and does not glorify that power structure even by the effort to topple it.

The *content* of liberation in the biblical witness is not the “nation-state” brotherhood engineered after the take-over but the covenant-peoplehood already existing because God has given it, and sure of its future because of the Name (“identity”) of God, not because of a coming campaign.

The *means* of liberation in the biblical witness is not prudentially justified violence but “mighty Acts” which may come through the destruction at the Red Sea—but may also come when the King is moved to be gracious to Esther, or to Daniel, or to Nehemiah.

From the “Believers’ Church” perspective, the “neo-constantinian” approach that blesses a going political movement [e.g., State Theology], and the “spiritualist” approach that downgrades the “temporal” [e.g., Church Theology] are mirror images. Both use biblical imagery more for window dressing than for content, both avoid seriously dealing with the way in which *pilgrim peoplehood* is projected by the Bible as the shape of salvation in any age.

... What the world most needs is not a new Caesar but a new style. A style is created, updated, projected, not by a nation or a government, but by a people.... Liberation is not a new King; we’ve tried that. Liberation is the presence of a new option, and only a non-conformed, covenanted people of God can offer that. Liberation is the pressure of the presence of a new alternative so valid, so coherent, that it can live without the props of power and against the stream of statesmanship. To *be* that option is to be free indeed.<sup>1110</sup>

Yoder’s cautionary observations, articulated already in 1973, become all the more significant when analyzing the South African situation since then. To put Yoder’s argument succinctly (although it is difficult to put it more succinctly than the above excerpt): although it is good and right to focus on liberation as this pursuit is central throughout the whole biblical narrative and is a vital element required for *shalom* in which we are invited to participate, our actions – i.e., our participation or the means and the form of our actions – must be congruent with the message of liberation for which we strive. What’s more, although there are singular moments of liberation, moments that are worth celebrating as they shape and define the people of God (e.g., the Exodus event), we must recognize that the struggle towards true liberation that will be the mark of God’s kingdom come must continue in one form or another until its full arrival. Yoder demonstrates how the Exodus event – an important, people shaping event to be remembered and celebrated – led to another chapter of oppression in the desert beginning at Sinai. Thus, the struggle towards

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<sup>1109</sup> Yoder, “Exodus and Exile,” 307.

<sup>1110</sup> Yoder, “Exodus and Exile,” 307-08.

liberation does not end when one oppressive obstacle is overcome, whether that be slavery in Egypt, walking in the desert after Sinai, gaining independence in Zimbabwe (only to be met with Robert Mugabe and his unwillingness to relinquish power), or overcoming apartheid. The struggle toward the liberation God desires remains and continues albeit in new and different ways. We are challenged to remain true to the biblical vision of liberation and to have our emancipatory practices reflect such a vision, despite the immediate, particular political forms that may and will exist.

The failure to remain true to a deeper vision of liberation only to accept and adopt a new vision of the nation-state (i.e., a vision centred around “nation-building”) is to remain enslaved by a neo-Constantinian imagination, which is what has happened to “Prophetic Theology” after the demise of apartheid. Because the struggle for emancipation became equated with the struggle against apartheid, which then needed to be set aside after apartheid’s fall so that a more constructive theology could be embraced (i.e., a “theology of reconstruction” or that of “nation-building”), the *raison d’être* for Prophetic Theology was lost once the apartheid system fell. What we can now see, however, is the ongoing need for liberation – even after South Africa’s “exodus” moment.

Unfortunately, the tendency to remain enslaved to a Constantinian or neo-Constantinian imagination is not new for Liberation Theology. Although the content of Prophetic or Liberation Theology tends to be dependable, it often falls victim to the perception that liberation comes in overcoming immediate and particular obstacles – most often political obstacles of some sort (e.g., regimes, political practices of nation-states, or particular policies, etc.<sup>1111</sup>) – thereby drawing too close a connection between the particular, immediate struggle with the *eschaton* itself.<sup>1112</sup> Such a perception, however, fails to be grounded in a more robust and deeper eschatological foundation. It falls into the risk of losing the transcendent vision and reason for

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<sup>1111</sup> A few examples can serve to demonstrate this point: Israel and its discriminatory policies towards Palestinians; capitalist pursuits continuing to victimize workers (e.g., in the mining industry); where education, especially education for the poor and most vulnerable in society, is compromised, resulting in new struggles such as the “#feesmustfall” movement; or other discriminatory policies (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, etc.).

<sup>1112</sup> Thomas Finger, for example, asks: “To what extent does the kerygma provide the standpoint from which they [liberation theologies] reflect on these social realities? To what extent does the kerygma illuminate perhaps critique these situations and contemporary theories?... Current social theories and situations provide a basis for liberation theologians. To what extent do they surrender the informative and critical Word which the kerygma utters concerning the present?” (Thomas N. Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach*, 2 vols. [Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1987], 77).

liberation.<sup>1113</sup> A more robust and deeper eschatological vision, therefore, is needed to feed and offer the necessary hope to sustain the (ongoing) struggle towards God's plan of liberation that culminates with God's kingdom.

Anabaptism, I argue, provides this deeper eschatological grounding and vision. Thomas Finger points out how a theology from an Anabaptist perspective could, in fact, begin with eschatology.<sup>1114</sup> Indeed, Finger himself proceeds to write a two part eschatological approach to Systematic Theology.<sup>1115</sup> The focus of Anabaptist eschatology, however, is not often the debate between postmillennialism, premillennialism, or amillennialism (although Anabaptists, both contemporary and historic, have ventured into these debates<sup>1116</sup>), but rather on the kingdom of God. Whereas some of the more evangelical traditions embrace an eschatological view that focuses on God's kingdom as an other-worldly destiny (i.e., heaven) for Christians that are "saved", the Anabaptist focus on God's kingdom provides the vision and the hope generated from such a vision as the foundation for discipleship and ecclesiological purpose within the Christian community (i.e., the church).<sup>1117</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>1113</sup> Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach*, 100. Indeed, this is similar to A. James Reimer's cautionary reminder to Mennonites and their work for peace. Reimer argues that Mennonites, in not paying attention to the triune character of God and thus God's transcendence, they run the risk of forgetting the divine identity of Jesus Christ and thus the reason why we follow Jesus the Christ and seek to embody his ways towards peace. See A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001), 392-405.

<sup>1114</sup> Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, 512.

<sup>1115</sup> Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach*. Such an emphasis is not entirely new as others have also provided a similar approach. Indeed, Jürgen Moltmann argues that "the eschatological outlook is characteristic of all Christian proclamation, of every Christian existence and of the whole Church" (Moltmann, *Theology of Hope; on the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, 16). See also George Eldon Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom: the Eschatology of Biblical Realism*, 1st ed. (New York,: Harper & Row, 1964).

<sup>1116</sup> For a helpful window into Anabaptist reflections surrounding these debates see Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, 512-61. In his chapter on "The Last Things", Finger demonstrates the way in which, during the Reformation, especially among some of the "Radical Reformers", there was an eschatological fervor – believing that they were living in the final days and that the arrival of God's kingdom was imminent. The most notorious example is that of Münster. Bernard Rothmann, the principle theologian in Münster, insisted that the prophecies found in the Old Testament surrounding the Last Days had to be implemented on earth before Christ's return. This included the judgment of the wicked so that God's kingdom could be erected, which led to the violent overtaking of the city of Münster as the location whereby God's kingdom would be inaugurated (Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, 531-32).

There were other examples before the Münsterite debacle. Finger, for example, describes Melchior Hoffman's preaching as "eschatologically charged" (Ibid., 529). "Melchior believed that history's final era had arrived" (Ibid., 529), and he offered several "end-time" scenarios that predicted the imminent arrival of God's kingdom (Ibid., 529-31).

<sup>1117</sup> César Garcia, the current General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference, for example notes: "The early Anabaptists understood the church not primarily in functional terms but in the context of the coming Kingdom of God.... [O]ur ecclesiology should model an alternative way of being in the world. Our churches should make visible the Kingdom we are proclaiming by being, among other things, a

as Willard Swartley<sup>1118</sup> highlights, eschatology “rather than justifying an escape from obedience, empowers the Christian moral life.”<sup>1119</sup> God’s kingdom provides the rationale and emphasis for: peace and a pacifist ethic; justice and challenging oppression and injustice; and the pursuit of reconciliation whereby right relationships are sought between one another, with creation, and with God. Put simply, the vision of God’s peaceable kingdom provides the rationale to be a people who seek to embody *shalom* – a holistic peace based on right relationships.<sup>1120</sup>

We see this emphasis in Menno Simmons, one of the early Anabaptist leaders, and his “Reply to False Accusations”:

The Scriptures teach that there are two opposing princes and two opposing kingdoms: the one is the Prince of peace; the other the prince of strife. Each of these princes has his particular kingdom and as the prince is so is also the kingdom. The Prince of peace is Christ Jesus; his kingdom is the kingdom of peace, which is his church; his messengers are the messengers of peace; his Word is the word of peace; his body is the body of peace; his children are the seed of peace; and his inheritance and reward are the inheritance and reward of peace. In short, with this King, and in his kingdom and reign, it is nothing but peace. Everything that is seen, heard, and done is peace.<sup>1121</sup>

Similarly, Robert J. Suderman, a contemporary Mennonite theologian and church leader in Canada, highlights the connection between “gospel” and “kingdom”. “Jesus’ gospel is that the kingdom of God is present among us.”<sup>1122</sup> The gospel message that Jesus both brings and points to the active presence of an alternative kingdom that is present and to which we are invited to participate. Not everyone, however, responds to this invitation. This, argues Suderman, is the reason why we often talk about God’s kingdom already here but not yet in its anticipated fullness (i.e., “the already but not

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biblical, liturgical, discipling, and pacifist community” (César Garcia, “The Relevance and Urgency of Anabaptism for Our Time: Several Proposals in Light of Contemporary Currents in Latin American Christianity,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 88, no. October [2014]: 467-68). Likewise, John Driver reminds us that “The church not only proclaims the Kingdom of God, but it also *is* the community of the Kingdom, an anticipation (modest but authentic) of the Kingdom” (Driver, *Contra Corriente*, xv. I am indebted to César Garcia for highlighting Driver’s reminder).

<sup>1118</sup> Swartley is a former Professor at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS).

<sup>1119</sup> Willard M. Swartley, “Peace and Violence in the New Testament: Definition and Methodology,” in *Struggles for Shalom: Peace and Violence across the Testaments*, ed. Laura L. Brenneman and Brad D. Schantz (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 152.

<sup>1120</sup> Nancy Heisey, Professor at Eastern Mennonite University, provides a very nice, succinct account of the way in which Mennonites from the Global South have continued to engage peace related themes as they reflect on and address their particular contexts. The focus on peace, she notes, is not, in other words, simply a theme on which Mennonites of the Global North reflect but continues to be a guiding vision for Anabaptist Christians throughout the world. See Nancy R. Heisey, “Peace and Scripture: Mennonite Perspectives from the Global South,” *ibid.*, 291-303.

<sup>1121</sup> Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources*, 280.

<sup>1122</sup> Suderman, *Re-Imagining the Church*, 5.

yet presence of the kingdom”).<sup>1123</sup> Jesus and the gospels – proclamations of the “good news” – paint a picture of what the world might look like when God’s kingdom approaches and becomes real in our communities:

Demons no longer rule the lives of people. Sick persons are healed. Lepers are liberated. Fisher folk form kingdom communities. The rich folks share their wealth. The powerful are merciful and compassionate. The violent ones opt for peace. The revolutionary commits to non-violent strategies. The hungry are fed. The naked are clothed. The prisoners are set free. Debts are forgiven. Land is distributed. Slaves are freed. Women are treated as equals. Samaritans become heroes. Children are held up as models. Leaders are re-defined as servants. People die for rather than kill each other. Forgiveness rather than revenge is practiced. Justice is the new norm. Oppression is eliminated. God is worshipped.

In other words, there is a new way to be and to live.<sup>1124</sup>

Such a vision of God’s kingdom affects the way one acts and the ongoing vision which drives the way we act until such a kingdom becomes fully present for all. And this, Suderman argues, is the spirituality that feeds and challenges the Christian in his or her attempt to give expressions to such a vision.<sup>1125</sup>

David Toole’s depiction of John Howard Yoder’s apocalypticism is perhaps the best portrayal of this eschatological perspective.<sup>1126</sup> Toole, in his *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*,<sup>1127</sup> explores the work of Nietzsche, Foucault, and Yoder in exploring the meaning of suffering. He first offers an analysis of Nietzsche and nihilism followed by Foucault’s tragedy before delving into the work of Yoder who, Toole argues, provides a more hopeful and purposeful apocalyptic metaphysics and politics than Nietzsche and Foucault. Toole uses Sarajevo as the backdrop of his analysis. Sarajevo has a unique and interesting history. Whereas it was once a city of hope because of the way it “embodied in a concrete way all of the hopes of the

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<sup>1123</sup> Thomas Finger also further explains this notion of “the already but not yet.” See Thomas N. Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 100-01.

<sup>1124</sup> Suderman, *Re-Imagining the Church*, 6.

<sup>1125</sup> See, for example, his chapter on “Where are we going?” in Robert J. Suderman, *Calloused Hands, Courageous Souls: Holistic Spirituality of Development and Mission* (Monrovia, California: MARC, 1998), 17-21.

<sup>1126</sup> David Toole is not, as far as I know, a self-identified Anabaptist or part of a denomination whose roots come out of the Anabaptist movement (e.g., Mennonite, Hutterite, Amish, Mennonite Brethren, or Brethren in Christ). And my use of his argument here does not suggest otherwise. I use his argument because, in my opinion, his portrayal of John Howard Yoder, probably the most significant Mennonite theologian of the twentieth century, and his argument highlights best the Anabaptist eschatological emphasis and perspective. Put simply, I use Toole as he demonstrates the eschatological (or apocalyptic) logic inherent in Yoder’s theology and, I believe, in Anabaptism in general.

<sup>1127</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*.



Enlightenment: a city where Jews and Muslims and Christians (both Catholic and Orthodox) lived together in peace, overcoming (but not abandoning) their religious differences,”<sup>1128</sup> it also becomes, suggests Toole, a location whereby these ideals of the Enlightenment came crashing down with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand which sparked the first World War. And this was but the first war of a most bloody and violent century, ending once again with a war waging in its streets from 1992-1996.

In 1993, in the midst of the fighting and rubble in Sarajevo, Susan Sontag staged a performance of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, a tragic comedy whereby Vladimir and Estragon await the arrival of Godot – a character who ultimately never arrives. These two events – the waging war and this performance of anticipation provides, argues Toole, “a focal power that draws us both into the presence of suffering and into questions about what suffering might mean, if indeed it means anything at all.... For Sontag’s performance of *Godot* in Sarajevo raises... a question concerning the character of a politics adequate to the task of living the good life in the face of suffering.”<sup>1129</sup>

We need not summarize Toole’s whole argument here.<sup>1130</sup> Suffice to say that Nietzsche’s nihilism paints suffering not as weak but meaningless. It is a byproduct of the struggle of wills. Suffering, therefore, stands as judgment against the world as it is while recognizing that another world, and therefore another possibility, does not exist.<sup>1131</sup> Even the attempts to engage and overcome such nihilism and bleak historicism, as John Milbank attempts to do, become entangled in the struggle of out-

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<sup>1128</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, xiii.

<sup>1129</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, xiv.

<sup>1130</sup> Several reviews have been written of his work. See for example: Miroslav Volf, "Review of *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse*," *The Christian Century* 115, no. 26 (1998); and Barry Harvey, "Review of *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse*," *Journal of Church and State* 41, no. 3 (1999).

<sup>1131</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 33. In describing Nietzsche’s argument, Toole notes that “no matter what many of us continue to believe, nihilism is a cultural fact because the notion of a ‘true world,’ although still present among us, has, again in Heidegger’s words, suffered the loss of its ‘constructive force’” (Ibid., 35). Heidegger, as Toole notes, is helpful: “In the word ‘God is dead’ the name ‘God,’ thought essentially, stands for the suprasensory world of those ideals which contain the goal that exists beyond earthly life for that life and that, accordingly, determine life from above, and also in a certain way, from without.... If God as the suprasensory ground and goal of all reality is dead, if the suprasensory world of the Ideas has suffered the loss of its obligatory and above all its vitalizing and upbuilding power, then nothing more remains to which man can cling and by which he can orient himself” (Heidegger, “The Word of Nietzsche,” 60, 64, 61 as quoted by Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 35).

narrating the other, thus becoming embedded in the struggle of the wills that serves as the bedrock of an ontology of violence. In this way, Milbank's own attempt to overcome Nietzsche's nihilism becomes but a tragic event, argues Toole, because it gets caught in the very struggle it sought to overcome.

Whereas Nietzsche can only provide a politics of terror and destruction as it is based on the metaphysical assumptions within the Dionysian will to power,<sup>1132</sup> Toole suggests that Foucault carries Nietzsche's logic further by affirming the Dionysian character which, instead of ending in terror and destruction (Nietzsche's conclusion), agitates the *polis* to practice of "welcoming the other into the very heart of public life."<sup>1133</sup> Foucault offers an alternative interpretation of the Dionysian character in that it provides the possibility of breaking out of the confining power of the reason and rationality discourse, which is intimately connected to mechanisms of power based on exclusion as a result of the will to truth. For Foucault the poet and the artist – as potential "madmen"<sup>1134</sup> – provide the potentiality of stepping outside the form of discourse that depends on the division between the same and the other, or between identity and difference.<sup>1135</sup> Thus, Foucault's reimagining of power through discourse, rather than Nietzsche's will to power, also offers a re-imagination of resistance.

Contrary to what some of Foucault's critics say, *Discipline and Punish* is not a dark and pessimistic description of our certain and inevitable confinement within the carceral city. Rather, it is a redescription of power that enables us to imagine resistance where previously none was imaginable.... For Foucault's redescription of power enables us to imagine what it might mean to say that the artist and the poet, and all those who have sought to dodge the incarcerating powers of the will to truth, must 'serve as the signs of our daily work' – the 'real work' of political resistance.<sup>1136</sup>

Thus, in returning to the theatre, Toole notes how, according to Foucault, the theatre becomes a countersite – an alternative space – that provides resistance while also providing a space for popular memory to be enlivened.<sup>1137</sup>

Although Foucault provides a helpful re-imagination of resistance, which provides a new form of politics, at the end of the day the best Foucault can point to –

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<sup>1132</sup> Toole notes that this is the politics of nihilism that Milbank attacks as it rests upon ontological assumptions about the necessity of violence (Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 132).

<sup>1133</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 133.

<sup>1134</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization; a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York,: Pantheon Books, 1965).

<sup>1135</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 156.

<sup>1136</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 176.

<sup>1137</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 195.

like Nietzsche – is the possibility of interpreting life as art.<sup>1138</sup> Foucault's politics, argues Toole, become tragic in that it becomes an art of dying: "life is rarely more beautiful than when it turns to face death as it races up the hill."<sup>1139</sup>

Foucault's politics of tragedy is not a politics founded upon skepticism, as [Romand] Coles and other have suggested, but one founded upon the difficult hope that chance is the god of history, that at some point life will no longer barter itself, and that humans will find the fortitude they need to stand up and die in order to utter a word or a poem.<sup>1140</sup>

Romand Coles argues that the problem with Foucault's politics is that it leaves too little space for hope – a hope that will sustain the desired resistance. Wendell Berry also makes an important observation:

Much protest is naïve; it expects quick, visible improvements and despairs and gives up when such improvement does not come. Protesters who hold out longer have perhaps understood that success is not the proper goal. If protest depended on success, there would be little protest of any durability or significance. History simply affords too little evidence that anyone's individual protest is of any use. Protest that endures, I think, is moved by a hope far more modest than that of public success: namely, the hope of preserving qualities of one's own heart and spirit that would be destroyed by acquiescence.<sup>1141</sup>

This, argues Toole, is the hope that comes from an apocalyptic politics.

"Apocalypse", notes Toole, points to God's involvement in history.<sup>1142</sup> It comes from the Greek *apokalypsis* which means "to reveal", "to disclose", or "to unveil".<sup>1143</sup> "To say that history is apocalyptic is to say both that its meaning depends upon certain disclosures of divinity and that the definitive such disclosure occurred at the cross."<sup>1144</sup> Rather than understanding apocalypticism as a sole concern about future catastrophic events, Toole, in following John Howard Yoder's lead, argues that the question John of Patmos poses in the Book of Revelation pertains to the meaning

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<sup>1138</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 196.

<sup>1139</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 196.

<sup>1140</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 204.

<sup>1141</sup> Wendell Berry, "A Poem of Difficult Hope," in *What Are People For?*, ed. Wendell Berry (San Francisco, CA: North Point Press, 1990), 62; Toole quotes Berry on pg. 203.

<sup>1142</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 207.

<sup>1143</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 207.

<sup>1144</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 207.

of history itself.<sup>1145</sup> Toole puts the strangeness of this biblically interpreted historiography well:

An apocalyptic style is a way of acknowledging the strangeness of this biblical world and, by extension, the world generally. When I speak of an apocalyptic historiography and an apocalyptic politics, I have in mind a particular style, a particular way of life, that, much like Foucault's aesthetics of existence, founds itself not upon the identity of the same but upon the otherness of a world that never ceases to be strange. In this world, history continues not because of what kings and presidents might do but because ravens keep alive a prophet starving in the desert (1 Kings 17) and because even as kings and presidents count their people and take their polls and plan the future, the word of God comes into the wilderness (Luke 3).

What the authors of both Kings and Luke knew is that ravens and peasants have more to do with the movement of history than all the best laid plans of kings. To adopt an apocalyptic style is to follow the biblical lead and turn our attention away from the power of kings and toward the power of ravens and peasant prophets in the wilderness.<sup>1146</sup>

Toole highlights the need to search for an alternative meaning found in an interpretation of history; an interpretation found outside of the traditional historical narratives.<sup>1147</sup> He describes this as an exercise in skepticism.

Like Foucault, Yoder commits himself to an exercise in skepticism toward traditional history in order to discover the 'loopholes' in the 'massive causal nexus' and thereby free us from the illusion of historical necessity. Unlike Foucault, who locates these loopholes by introducing chance into the production of events, Yoder allows for our freedom and resistance by introducing God into history—or more accurately, by encouraging us to discern God's presence amidst events.<sup>1148</sup>

History, therefore, becomes the scene of the unique and the impossible.<sup>1149</sup> Whereas Foucault describes this impossibility as "chance", Yoder describes it as "God".<sup>1150</sup> This difference, however, is significant as "God", for Yoder, invokes the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>1151</sup> Yoder's counter-history, therefore, is based on a particularity missing in Foucault.<sup>1152</sup> And a community shaped by and committed to such a counter-history is able to know "not what they would do differently if they were rulers, nor how to seize power, but that the present power constellation which

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<sup>1145</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 209.

<sup>1146</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 210.

<sup>1147</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 211.

<sup>1148</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 211.

<sup>1149</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 211-12.

<sup>1150</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 212.

<sup>1151</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 212.

<sup>1152</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 212.

oppresses them is not the last word.”<sup>1153</sup> Put another way, rather being focused on making history “come out right”, as though we have the capability and know-how in how history is supposed to turn out, which, when we try to place such “handles” on history and move it in the direction we think is right, is achieved through force, pressure, and violence, this community shaped by the particularity of Jesus focuses on being faithful to God’s politics as revealed in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. This leaves the responsibility in the way history moves to God, the one who has power over life and death. As Yoder himself says: “The cross is the extreme demonstration that *agape* seeks neither effectiveness nor justice, and is willing to suffer any loss or seeming defeat for the sake of obedience. But the cross is not defeat... Effectiveness and success had been sacrificed for the sake of love, but this sacrifice was turned by God into a victory which vindicated to the utmost the apparent impotence of love.”<sup>1154</sup> In this way, and to use Michael Neocosmos’ wording noted earlier, the cross-shaped community, i.e., the church, becomes the impossible possibility<sup>1155</sup> – the embodiment of an alternative political reality in the world whereby the cross and not the crown determines the meaning of history.<sup>1156</sup>

Toole, in summarizing Yoder’s contribution, offers, I believe, a great summary of the Anabaptist eschatological perspective and logic. In Anabaptism, it is the eschatological outlook that provides meaning and rationale for the form of life disciples of Jesus seek to embody. The community that is formed seeks to embody together the impossible possibility – that which is deemed to be unrealistic and potentially ineffective in controlling the direction and outcome of history but which, in being faithful to the ways of God’s kingdom, becomes revealed as possible. The resurrection, after all, was only possible because of the cross! Harry Huebner

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<sup>1153</sup> Yoder, “Armaments and Eschatology,” 53. Indeed, Yoder defines “eschatology” as “a hope which, defying present frustration, defines a present position in terms of the yet unseen goal which gives it meaning” (John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* [Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1971], 56).

<sup>1154</sup> Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 59-60. Brian Haymes and Kyle Gingerich Hiebert note how Revelation 5:1-12 (“Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!) ultimately defines the meaningfulness of history: “The question of the meaningfulness of history is here laid bare and that the slaughtered Lamb alone is able to open the scroll means that suffering and not coercive power determines the meaning of history” (Brian Haymes and Kyle Gingerich Hiebert, *God after Christendom*, After Christendom Series [Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2015], 135).

<sup>1155</sup> Cf. 229.

<sup>1156</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 215.

describes this as living as a sign even while living “out of control.”<sup>1157</sup> It is in this seemingly “upside-down” understanding that Huebner describes as the way in which the church is to live as signs and rule the world. And yet, rather than understanding “ruling” the same way as the world has come to understand it, the church, as comprised by followers of the crucified one, “rule” differently. Huebner suggests different practices in how the church “rules”:

First, give priority to Christian celebration—worship. In worshipping the slaughtered but living Lamb we ‘rule the world’ by unmasking the fallen power’s pretentious claim to ultimacy. Second, learn to see how God is at work in the world. The Christian community is called to work diligently at the task of discerning which historical developments represent progress of the Rule of God and which do not. Third, train ourselves to believe that, despite evidence to the contrary, the world is in the process of being brought under the rule of the Lamb. Fourth, affirm the power of weakness and believe that underdogs do have power. Fifth, become convinced that the appropriate criterion for assessing an action ‘is not the predictable success before it but the resurrection behind it, not manipulation but praise.’<sup>1158</sup>

Such an eschatologically informed perspective spurs those formed by it to continue the struggle towards the fulfillment of God’s kingdom. The struggle, in other words, continues despite the advances or drawbacks that occur due to particular socio-political events. Although Anabaptism tends to share many of the same commitments towards justice and peace as Prophetic or Liberation Theology, the eschatological depth of Anabaptism provides greater sustainability for such struggles, especially when particular moments of oppression and injustice are overcome. Overcoming such moments does not, for Anabaptism, draw an end to the struggle towards God’s kingdom and its anticipated fullness. And it is the professing community – the church – who carries the task of continuing the struggle whilst already embodying the vision of what is to come. The church not only carries the message of liberation but also embodies the means of God’s emancipatory vision that provides meaning for our ongoing struggle and the related practices. In this way, an Anabaptist eschatological perspective may be valuable in reclaiming and re-embodying a prophetic theology.

## 2) An Anabaptist perspective on power: Embracing (an “upside down” understanding of) Power

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<sup>1157</sup> Huebner, *Echoes of the Word*, 245.

<sup>1158</sup> Huebner, *Echoes of the Word*, 246.

A second trait that an Anabaptist perspective can help reclaim a prophetic imagination in the South African context is to recognize and embrace an alternative understanding of power. This is not foreign to South African theology as this was a significant element in its prophetic theology tradition (see ch. 3). This was one of the significant ways in which the embodiment of Prophetic Theology was different and a challenge to both State Theology and Church Theology. Unfortunately, it is not a perspective that has been sustained, as noted in the previous chapter, as post-apartheid theology has succumbed to the temptation of Constantinianism and its understanding of power. In this section I will attempt to offer an alternative understanding of power as understood through an Anabaptist lens.

Put simply, rather than continuing to operate according to a “top-down” understanding of power, which was explained in the previous chapter, Anabaptism seeks to embrace and embody an “upside-down” understanding of power – a form of power that Anabaptists would actually argue is “right-side up”. As their eschatological perspective would suggest, Anabaptists, because of the triumph of the Lamb, believe it is possible to embody already now a lived expression of that which is to come (i.e., God’s kingdom) and a form of power that is not based on domination, force, or violence, but rather one that is based on love, service, and sacrifice while confronting oppression, injustice, violence and the sin of the world.

As Anabaptism is concerned with taking the biblical narrative seriously as instructive for the way we live in the world, it is important to understand how power as such is used and interpreted in the biblical narrative.<sup>1159</sup>

Power is not a foreign concept in the Bible.<sup>1160</sup> In the New Testament, for example, there are two common terms used to describe power: *dynamis* and *exousia*. Even though these are regularly used to describe “power”, they are not synonyms. Indeed, there are some significant differences in how these two terms are used. *Dynamis* is often used to refer to the ability to act. It often describes an activity that

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<sup>1159</sup> The following exegesis is largely taken from my paper “‘Who’ll Be a Witness for My Lord?’ Witnessing as an Ecclesiological and Missiological Paradigm” in *Missionalia*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>1160</sup> Due to the scope of this dissertation it will obviously not be possible to give an entire overview of the Bible regarding the question of power. Nor need I as much has been written on this topic. See Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 134-61; Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988); and of course Walter Wink’s trilogy on “the powers”: Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1984); Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence*, The Powers (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); and Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, The Powers (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

transforms things.<sup>1161</sup> *Exousia* is usually used to describe power in relation to authority. It depicts the authority to act rather than the ability to act itself.

In the books of Luke and Acts as an example,<sup>1162</sup> every instance the author uses *dynamis* (15 times in Luke and 10 times in Acts), except for one (Luke 10:19), it is used to describe either the characteristic and ability of God (e.g., “power of the most High”; “power of the Holy Spirit”; “power of the Lord”; “power of God”; etc.) or the extension of what is possible through Godly power (e.g., power to heal, power to cast out demons, power to do mighty works, power to do signs and miracles, etc.).<sup>1163</sup> Almost entirely, *dynamis* is used to describe the ability of God or those committed to acting in the ways of God to act in a way that transforms something into a new way of being – a new ontological reality.

*Exousia*, on the other hand, is used 16 times in Luke and 7 times in the book of Acts. It is more complex. *Exousia* is used positively when it refers to authority belonging to God or Jesus Christ.<sup>1164</sup> Yet 17 of the 23 times the author uses *exousia* in a more negative way. It is more often used in an almost derogatory way in reference to those who are in positions that rule over others. It sharply contrasts between those in possession of “worldly” authority as opposed to Godly authority.<sup>1165</sup> Indeed, there are several instances where the author’s use of *exousia* as authority to rule over others is the opposite of Godly power.<sup>1166</sup> This suggests that possessing authority *over*

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<sup>1161</sup> In this way there are similarities with the definition of power offered in the previous chapter: the ability to cause something or cause something to be.

<sup>1162</sup> For an overarching study regarding “power” throughout the New Testament, see Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 13-35.

<sup>1163</sup> Interestingly, Wink’s demonstrates the shift that occurs in the way *dynamis* is used throughout the New Testament. Wink argues that “In the New Testament, and increasingly in later Christian writers, both orthodox and gnostic, the ‘Powers’ are no longer so much God’s agents as God’s enemies. The ‘Lord of the Powers’ now is engaged in a cosmic struggle to assert lordship *over* the Powers” (Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 17).

<sup>1164</sup> e.g., Luke 4:32 & 4:36 Jesus has authority over spirits; 5:24 Jesus has authority/power to forgive sins; 9:1 Jesus gives authority to the disciples to cast out demons and to heal; Acts 1:7 God has authority; 8:19 Simon requests for authority so that people could receive the Holy Spirit.

<sup>1165</sup> E.g., Luke 4:6 refers to the authority that the devil possesses and provides; 7:8 refers to the authority the Centurion possesses over others; 12:11 refers to those who rule society – leaders in the synagogues, the magistrates, and the authorities; 19:17 refers to the authority a servant receives over cities; 20:2 the chief priests and scribes ask Jesus “by what authority are you doing these things?”; 20:8 Jesus does not respond to the question regarding authority; 20:20 notes that authority is possessed by the governor (particularly interesting considering the rest of the dialogue in the chapter that leads to this statement); 22:53 refers to the power of darkness; 23:7 refers to what is in Herod’s jurisdiction; Acts 5:4 refers to the power/control that Ananias had over his own land and possessions; 9:14, 26:10, and 26:12 authority is in reference to the chief priests; and 26:18 refers to the power of Satan.

<sup>1166</sup> Three examples will suffice in highlighting this point. 1) In the temptations of Jesus, the devil speaks about the authority (*exousia*) he possesses and with which he tempts Jesus: “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish”



others, is not, it seems, the way of Jesus or the desire of God.<sup>1167</sup> We can, therefore, conclude that God is the rightful possessor of authority (as Acts 1:7 suggests), but authority *over* others is not the way in which power is to be embodied among Jesus' followers. Possessing or seeking to possess authority over others falls into the temptation of embodying a "power from above" and embraces a form of power as (a system of) domination.<sup>1168</sup>

Jesus, however, rejects all forms of dominating hierarchies. He repudiates the very premise on which domination is based, e.g., the right of some to lord it over others.<sup>1169</sup> Indeed, this is perhaps the primary lesson of Jesus' third temptation in Matthew's Gospel.<sup>1170</sup> This does not, however, mean that Jesus rejects power as such. Power can be and is good when it is based on and participates in, what Wink describes as, "God's domination-free order".<sup>1171</sup> Indeed, as noted in chapter five, creation is an act of power and it was deemed to be "good."<sup>1172</sup>

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(Luke 4:6). Here *exousia* is a possession and a tool of the devil. 2) A second example can be found when Jesus' authority is questioned (Luke 20:1-8). Jesus is asked "by what authority [*exousia*] are You doing these things [miracles, healing, driving out unclean spirits, etc.]" Rather than getting into a battle about who has authority (*exousia*), Jesus, in a similar move to that of the temptations where Jesus failed to participate in the quest for the same type of authority that the devil possesses, side steps the question and refuses to participate in the system of ruling over, or having authority over, others. Interestingly, however, the author throws another reference in the same chapter that highlights that authority—this type of authority that Jesus sidesteps—is something which the governor possesses. *Exousia*, in other words, is again distinguished as a feature of worldly kingdoms or rulership, not a feature in the ways of God's kingdom (which again brings into perspective the second temptation of Jesus regarding the nature of the kingdoms of this world – Luke 4:5-8). 3) Lastly, in the final chapter in the book of Acts (Acts 26), there is an interesting interplay in the way *exousia* is used. *Exousia* is used 3 times in this chapter. The first two times it is used to describe the authority of the chief priests, a reference made to Paul's old life when he was persecuting the church. The last time, 26:18, it is used to describe the power of Satan. Although there are more examples that can be given, these three serve to demonstrate the point that *exousia*, when not referring to God's authority, is often used with a more negative connotation.

<sup>1167</sup> Note that I am not making a generalized conclusion about the nature of *exousia* in the whole New Testament. To do this we would need to look beyond Luke and Acts. I am here drawing this conclusion on the way this term is used in Luke and Acts. For a broader perspective in how such terms are used throughout the New Testament, see Wink, *Naming the Powers*. What is noteworthy in Walter Wink's book, however, is that 85 percent of the time *exousia* is used in the New Testament it refers to a "structural dimension of existence" (Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 15-16), which are often depicted as fallen. See also Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 137-58.

<sup>1168</sup> Wink, *When the Powers Fall*, 4.

<sup>1169</sup> Wink, *When the Powers Fall*, 7.

<sup>1170</sup> Matthew 4:8-10; the second temptation in Luke's Gospel (Luke 4:5-8).

<sup>1171</sup> Wink, *When the Powers Fall*, 6.

<sup>1172</sup> Lydia Harder, for example, states: "Understanding creation as an act of grace means that creation is understood by [Anabaptist-]Mennonites through the lens of God's redemptive action in creating a new humanity. Both creation and salvation happen at God's initiative and are God's gift to humanity. However, because God's original intention in creation is obscured through sin, new creation is necessary in order for humanity to really acknowledge God as Creator. For [Anabaptist-]Mennonites

The story of the disciples' encounter with Jesus at the beginning of Acts (Acts 1:4-8) offers a good example.<sup>1173</sup> In this encounter (and in the book of Acts in general) power is redefined. Acts 1:7 declares God to be the rightful possessor of authority (*exousia*). Immediately after this declaration, the author suggests that the apostles shall receive power (*dynamis*) when the Holy Spirit descends upon them (Acts 1:8). The power (*dynamis*), or ability to act, referred to in this verse is the ability to be *witnesses* to Jesus. The word that is translated as "witnesses" here is the Greek word μαρτυς (*martus*). It is noteworthy that this same word would a century later be used to describe those who would die because of their faith – i.e., martyrs. Out of all of the derivatives of *martyrion* (μαρτυριον), *martus* is the form most often used in the book of Acts (13 times). Although *martus* at first meant "to give witness to" or "to testify" and was not necessarily connected to death, it is significant that in a very short period of time – between 10 – 30 years (depending on whether you ascribe to the idea that the book of Acts was written in the early 60's or in the 80's) – *martus* would become associated with death and martyrdom.<sup>1174</sup> Already in the book of Acts, for example, we are told about Stephen who becomes the first martyr. Others soon meet the same fate – Peter, Paul, and countless others in the early church. Christian faith and being a "witness" to Jesus Christ became closely associated with martyrdom in the early years of the church. The bodies of the early Christians were, in a very literal way, given as a living sacrifice and testimony to God. Martyrdom became but one species of a larger narrative genre that comprehends the death of believers at the

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the theological discussion of creation thus becomes a sub-set of the soteriological and ecclesial aspects of God's activity" (Harder, "A Hermeneutics of Discipleship," 67).

<sup>1173</sup> Acts 1:4-8 reads:

"And being assembled together with them, He [Jesus] commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'" (NKJV).

<sup>1174</sup> We can already see the connection between *martus* and death in several instances in the book of Revelation (e.g., Rev. 1:5, 2:13, 6:9, 12:11, 17:6). Scholars suggest that the book of Revelation was written in the 90's CE. There is ongoing debate as to when the book of Acts was written. Some argue that it was written in the 80's, whereas others argue that it was written in the early 60's. Either way, we can see how the meaning of *martus* began to shift from simply "testifying" to an understanding that intimately connected testifying with death and martyrdom.

hands of hostile authorities within a wide range of other faithful practices that becomes a bodily witness to God's drama of salvation in the world.<sup>1175</sup>

Thus, the power Jesus promises through the arrival of the Holy Spirit points to a vastly different understanding of power than that which emerged in the Christian church after Constantine. Whereas power in the post-Constantinian church has largely embraced the empire definition of power, a "power from above", a hierarchical form of power based on ruling over others, which ultimately rests on forms of change brought about through force, domination, conquest, and control,<sup>1176</sup> the power that Jesus promises is one that allows those who receive it to act in a way that mimics the ways of Jesus and the desire of God. It is a promise of receiving *dynamis* which invites followers of Jesus to challenge injustice and violence, to heal, and to participate in mighty works in a way that is based on love, invitation, servanthood, and care for the other. The form of power that Jesus promises is one that allows those who receive it to live in ways that imitate the life and kenotic example of Jesus, even if, like their teacher, it also leads to one's own death,<sup>1177</sup> which for Anabaptists became a reality. Indeed, as Stanley Hauerwas reminds us, "genuine politics is about the art of dying."<sup>1178</sup> This forms the basis of a "power from below". And it is this form of power that Anabaptism shares with South African Prophetic Theology as both provided (provides) an alternative political witness in the face of oppression, violence, and death.

The biblical narrative, rather than avoiding power, redefines it, or rather provides us with the way it was originally understood. Indeed, it reminds us of the original good and Godly purpose of power.

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<sup>1175</sup> Stephen Fowl, "The Primacy of the Witness of the Body to Martyrdom in Paul," in *Witness of the Body: The Past, Present, and Future of Christian Martyrdom*, ed. Michael L. Budde and Karen Scott (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 44.

<sup>1176</sup> Tommaso Laureti's 1585 painting of the "Triumph of Christianity" over paganism is an excellent example of such an understanding whereby a triumphant cross stands over a smashed and broken pagan statue. In this painting one can see how power, which is obviously depicted to be on the side of Christianity, which is ironically symbolized by the cross, is depicted as that which overcomes, defeats, and smashes those that oppose it. The irony being that the cross itself is a symbol of ultimate love in dying for the other, even the enemy.

<sup>1177</sup> The World Council of Church's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) describes this as receiving the inspiration from the Holy Spirit "to a self-emptying and cross-bearing life-style" as we bear witness "to the love of God in word and deed." See Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum, "Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes," (2013), 37.

<sup>1178</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom?: How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 43.

The inbreaking reign of God in the life of Jesus undercut the authority of all other reigning power structures. His whole life directly challenged the legitimacy of the power structures of his day. He was killed because the challenge was so relevant to the fundamental issue of domination in human organization.<sup>1179</sup>

As Walter Klaassen also notes: “It is an old fallacy to assume that a basic change takes place in society when Christians take over the reins of power. But as long as the old rules of the use of power continue to operate in our society, even a Christian will not be able to accomplish basic changes.”<sup>1180</sup> Rather, as Lydia Harder, a Canadian Mennonite theologian and pastor, argues, God’s creative and, I would add, life-giving, invitational, and loving power is embodied through the life and witness of Jesus; and this offers us a clue in the way God desires to work.<sup>1181</sup> It provides an example not only in how Jesus’ disciples should live, but what power – Godly power – looks like and how it functions. It demonstrates, for example, how even the cross, an event that is not pursued for its own sake but rather is a consequence of a life lived in allegiance to God’s kingdom and its politics, is not a symbol of weakness but demonstrates the grain of the universe in how God’s restoration becomes reality.

Yoder helpfully connects this apocalyptic or eschatological vision and the alternative understanding of power that arises from it:

The point that apocalyptic makes is not only that people who wear crowns and who claim to foster justice by the swords are not as strong as they think – true as that is: we will sing, ‘O where are Kings and Empires now of old that went and came?’ It is that people who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe. One does not come to that belief by reducing social process to mechanical and statistical models, nor by winning some of one’s battles for the control of one’s own corner of the fallen world. One comes to it by sharing the life of those who sing about the Resurrection of the slain Lamb.<sup>1182</sup>

In summary, this alternative understanding calls into question the implied assumption that rulers and those in authority – those typically depicted as being “in power” – are the only actors that have the ability to cause something in society. Instead, what the above highlights is the way in which even those who are not “in power” (i.e., those who are not “in control”) can meaningfully determine the way in which one relates to the other. Put differently, this “upside-down” understanding of

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<sup>1179</sup> Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1978), 284.

<sup>1180</sup> Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant*, 81.

<sup>1181</sup> Harder, “A Hermeneutics of Discipleship,” 66.

<sup>1182</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Armaments and Eschatology,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 1, no. 1 (1988): 58.

power – or perhaps it is better to describe it as “right-side up” as it follows the grain of God’s universe – provides the basis for an alternative social imagination and a new politics based on God’s power as demonstrated through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

### 3) An Anabaptist perspective on Church: Becoming an alternative community

The above highlights are the implications for Anabaptist ecclesiology. The church, as a community created by those who have voluntarily responded to Christ’s invitation to follow him and his way, carries the responsibility to embody now the good news – the *euaggelion* – of God’s kingdom present with us. The church is the entity that seeks to embody now the eschatological vision of God’s kingdom, which operates according to an alternative (or original!) understanding of power. As such, the church is viewed as a people – a community – that already seeks to put into practice the alternative way in which people who are led by God’s vision can live in relationship to one another. The church, in other words, becomes an entity that embodies a different form of politics in the world.

Robert Suderman offers perhaps one of the most robust accounts of a contemporary Anabaptist ecclesiological perspective. In staying true to the Anabaptist desire to be biblically grounded and led, he begins from a biblical account of “church”.

In his chapter “Reflections on Anabaptist ecclesiology,”<sup>1183</sup> Suderman highlights how traits that have come to be important, perhaps even distinctive, in Anabaptism are not simply embodied for their own sake but rather because of its ecclesial foundation. Suderman states:

- Peace is not simply activism; it is the way a community of Jesus lives its life.
- Discipleship is not simply learning to be a good Christian; it is learning to be a good church.
- Community is not simply sharing common things; it is together sharing the mind of Christ as a witness to the world.
- Simplicity is not simply a matter of economic stewardship; it is demonstrating that as a Body it is possible to trust in God’s provisions for our lives.
- Baptism is not simply a public witness of our individual decision to accept Christ; it is a commitment to offer our gifts to the life of the Body of Christ, and to be nurtured and disciplined by that community.

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<sup>1183</sup> This was originally a paper presented in 2011 during a two-year conversation between the Mennonite World Conference and the Seventh Day Adventists.

- Pacifism and non-violence are not simply ethical choices we make to be better people; they are creating a community that aligns with the path chosen by Jesus so that we can be worthy of being called his Body.
- ethics are not simply a code of behaviour; they are a mirror of the habits of God's people and how they treat each other and learn to live together as a paradigm of reconciliation.
- non-conformity is not simply difference from the directions of the societies around us; it is a demonstration that there is another empire present in the same territory, and this community marches to the beat of that empire, and has granted it supreme authority over who we are and want to become.
- the church is not simply other than the state because it has different functions; it is not the state because it recognizes a different Lord as the "head of state."
- Salvation is not simply rescuing individual souls from eternal destruction; it is the on-going vigorous presence of a community that invites others to enlist in an alternative cause that has as its agenda the promise of setting things right—the way they were meant to be.
- evangelism is not simply proclaiming the truths of God; it is living the good news of the presence of the Kingdom and bringing its values into a visible, accessible and tangible reality for others.<sup>1184</sup>

As one can see from the above, the church – *ekklesia* or “a peoplehood” – acts as the foundation for the different forms of activity that arise. Indeed, throughout the biblical narrative we see how God desires to work through a people. Suderman argues that transforming and restoring creation to its divine purposes – the eschatological hope of God's kingdom – is best done through the formation of peoplehood – the church – as it seeks to be an indicator of God's kingdom – Jesus and his life, teachings, death, and resurrection.<sup>1185</sup> This, says Suderman, is the three-legged stool that shapes and nurtures the Anabaptist perspective regarding the vocation of the church: kingdom, Jesus, and church.<sup>1186</sup> “Anabaptists believe that proclaiming Jesus as both Saviour and Lord means that Jesus both creates a peoplehood and that it will understand living out the Kingdom of God in the way he demonstrated.”<sup>1187</sup>

Furthermore, there is no conceptual distinction between the purpose of creation and the intention of redemption. Likewise, there is no conceptual distinction between the intentions of redemption and the purposes of discipleship.<sup>1188</sup> And one cannot, argues Suderman, talk about creation, redemption, discipleship, purpose, and intention without talking about peoplehood.

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<sup>1184</sup> Suderman, *Re-Imagining the Church*, 32.

<sup>1185</sup> Suderman, *Re-Imagining the Church*, 33.

<sup>1186</sup> Suderman, *Re-Imagining the Church*, 34.

<sup>1187</sup> Suderman, *Re-Imagining the Church*, 34.

<sup>1188</sup> Here Suderman offers an interesting anecdote: “Very recently, the head of a major historical denomination in Canada told me: ‘Our church believes in Jesus too, but only as the source of our salvation, not as the primary source for our ethics.’ In other words,” Suderman notes, “he is saying that Jesus creates peoplehood, but is not the primary inspiration for the way this peoplehood lives out its vocation” (Ibid., 34).

The primary sacrament is the grace extended by God to the world through the presence and life of the community in its context, i.e., the church is understood to be the sacrament of God's multi-dimensional grace. It is in the visible community of Christ where the presence of God's grace can be seen, touched, and experienced. It is also an invitational and hospitable place where those seeking and experiencing life in God may come and live out God's mission with the brothers and sisters of the community and together in the larger world. In this life together the Gospel is discerned and exercised which implies that the Body is disciplined to live out its vocational purposes. The church thus becomes the preferred and primary vehicle for the transformation of the world so passionately desired by God.<sup>1189</sup>

This does not mean that God cannot or does not work outside of the church. Indeed God does! The fact that God is involved in creation does not, however, detract from the portrayal of God's intention for God's community – what Suderman describes as a peoplehood – to conform to and be the living, breathing example God intends for the world.

Lydia Harder also helps us to better understand the notion of church from an Anabaptist perspective. Jesus, she notes, became an authoritative figure in history precisely because he brought about a new kind of historical reality.<sup>1190</sup> The church, this disciplined hermeneutic community, continues “this movement in history by embodying in itself this Jesus story.”<sup>1191</sup> Jesus, therefore, becomes of central importance for determining the way in which this community ought to relate to another as well as the way in which this community ought to live in the world.<sup>1192</sup> Thus, the church, as the embodiment of this new creation, ought to reflect this Christological character.

Anabaptist-Mennonites have insisted that God's new creation has a particular political shape which embodies the gospel message of reconciliation. The people of God are living epistles, known and read by all (2 Cor. 3:2). Mennonites have thus rejected the normativity of Christendom and have insisted that the ‘Constantinian shift’ which made the church coexistent with the established society also distanced the church from the biblical understanding of the people of God. Instead Mennonite theology has

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<sup>1189</sup> Suderman, *Re-Imagining the Church*, 35-36.

<sup>1190</sup> Harder, "A Hermeneutics of Discipleship," 63-64.

<sup>1191</sup> Harder, "A Hermeneutics of Discipleship," 64.

<sup>1192</sup> Harder notes: “Understanding creation as an act of grace means that creation is understood by Mennonites through the lens of God's redemptive action in creating a new humanity. Both creation and salvation happen at God's initiative and are God's gift to humanity. However, because God's original intention in creation is obscured through sin, new creation is necessary in order for humanity to really acknowledge God as Creator. For Mennonites the theological discussion of creation thus becomes a sub-set of the soteriological and ecclesial aspects of God's activity” (Ibid., 67).

emphasized the pilgrim and alien quality of its new political reality as a minority church which lives in nonconformity to the values of the larger culture.<sup>1193</sup>

The church as understood through the Anabaptist lens is a new social reality. It is therefore also understood as a new political reality.<sup>1194</sup> It seeks to put into practice new ways in which people can and should relate to one another. This also shapes the way in which the church relates to, engages, and gets involved in society.<sup>1195</sup> There are times, for example, when the church, as a community of Christ followers seeking to be a demonstration plot of God's kingdom now, participates in that which further demonstrates kingdom of God values (e.g., activities and processes that lead to peace, justice, and reconciliation whilst embodying such traits in its activities and processes). Then there are other times when the church distances itself from actions and practices that do not faithfully embody kingdom of God values. This in turn creates opportunities to embody and demonstrate something new – a new political witness (i.e., a new way in which to relate with others). For example, when an economic

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<sup>1193</sup> Harder, "A Hermeneutics of Discipleship," 68-69.

<sup>1194</sup> Harder, "A Hermeneutics of Discipleship," 69.

<sup>1195</sup> This is one point where I disagree with A. James Reimer, a prominent Canadian Mennonite theologian of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. In reflecting on Oliver O'Donovan's comments regarding Mennonites, claiming that he could not find any coherent and systematic treatment of pacifist social theory by Anabaptist or Mennonite writers, Reimer, in coming to suspect that O'Donovan is partly right, states: "It's not that we don't have biblical, historical, and ethical apologetics for our peace position, but that we lack a systematic political theory in which the positive role of civil institutions outside of the church is elaborated from the perspective of the Historic Peace Church tradition. We have worked out systematically our own view of Christian social ethics from within the womb of the church but not thought a great deal about the positive function of the whole range of human institutions outside church and parachurch agencies" (A. James Reimer and Paul G. Doerksen, *Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology: Law, Order, and Civil Society*, Theopolitical Visions [Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014], 19-20). In my view, Reimer falls victim to a very narrow understanding of "politics" as well as a narrow understanding regarding the nature and (political) witness of the church. First, Reimer seemingly equates politics with civil institutions. Likewise, if what he says about the church is true, that it has not "thought a great deal about the positive function of the whole range of human institutions outside church and parachurch agencies," the church, therefore is portrayed as a negative and separate entity from the world. Although there certainly are examples within Mennonite history where this has been the case, I do not think this is the rationale of Mennonite ecclesiology. Ironically, Stanley Hauerwas, in my opinion, having been deeply influenced by John Howard Yoder but who is not himself a Mennonite, understands the political implications of a Mennonite-Anabaptist ecclesiology better than some Mennonites. Hauerwas for example suggests that the church does not possess a particular social ethic; it is, rather, a social ethic (Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* [Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983], 99). "The church," he says elsewhere, "does not exist to provide an ethos for democracy or any other form of social organization, but stands as a political alternative to every nation, witnessing to the kind of social life possible for those that have been formed by the story of Christ" (Stanley Hauerwas, John Berkman, and Michael G. Cartwright, *The Hauerwas Reader* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001], 114-15). See also his portrayal of Mennonite ecclesiology in his (and William Willimon's) *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*. See also Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).



system proves to continually oppress some due to its practices of competition, hoarding, and concern only for one's own self (e.g., capitalism), thus failing to embrace and put into practice kingdom of God values with a concern for the wellbeing of everyone, the church can then demonstrate a new form of economic practice that first seeks to share and take care of one another. Another example is to not participate in fighting for "the peace." Instead, the church demonstrates how to struggle against injustice and violence in ways that steps out of the cycle of violence, embodying the peace – *shalom* – that is sought. Put simply, the church embodies a new political reality as a new – and different – social reality in the world.

Given the Anabaptist pursuit to embody a new political reality in the face of the old, Anabaptism has often been perceived or described as centrally nonconformist because of its alternative ethic.<sup>1196</sup> Harder highlights how this "commitment to nonconformity" arises precisely because of its eschatological view of history "in which the church has an important role in the creative purposes of God."<sup>1197</sup> She states:

The mission of the church arises out of this identity as a servant church created by God to proclaim and embody God's good news of the kingdom. The political shape of the church as an alternative society is crucial because only then can it fulfil [sic] its mission not only to proclaim but also to embody God's creative purpose in the midst of a society which has failed to give ultimate allegiance to God.<sup>1198</sup>

This Anabaptist ecclesiological understanding should not suggest, as the rest of Harder's work highlights, that such communities have been perfect in embodying this ethic of peace and reconciliation. Indeed, Harder demonstrates how those whose roots emerge from the Anabaptist movement (e.g., Mennonites) have not always consistently embodied their "peace theology", especially within the home and the way in which women have been treated within the community.<sup>1199</sup> This Anabaptist understanding of church does, however, highlight the desire, vision, and purpose of the church – a people who seek to first and foremost give expression, as imperfect as

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<sup>1196</sup> A nonconformity that Harder suggests has emphasized the way of peace and reconciliation, which includes service, nonresistance, and the rejection of violence (Harder, "A Hermeneutics of Discipleship," 69).

<sup>1197</sup> Harder, "A Hermeneutics of Discipleship," 69.

<sup>1198</sup> Harder, "A Hermeneutics of Discipleship," 70.

<sup>1199</sup> See Harder, "A Hermeneutics of Discipleship," 79-116. This has most recently become evident in the contradiction between John Howard Yoder's theology and his abusive relationships with women. For more on this see Rachel Waltner Goossen, "'Defanging the Beast': Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89 (January 2015).

it will undoubtedly be, to God's will for the way humanity ought to relate to each other, creation, and to God. "... [T]he church is called to be a sign and witness to the world of what the kingdom of God is like. True, the church is not responsible for the world, nor does it bring about the kingdom of God—that is something only God can and will do. But the church is actively involved in the world, demonstrating to the world God's desire for it."<sup>1200</sup> Harry Huebner puts it this way: "... our moral identity as church must consciously be given shape by who we are as disciples of Jesus Christ, not by who we are as members of society."<sup>1201</sup>

Given this pursuit to embody and witness to God's kingdom, the church therefore becomes an alternative political body in the world. It offers a different way in which people can relate to one another. There is a new way to be and to live in the world. And this, argues Suderman, forms the basis of what it means to be the church.

The church is meant to be an alternative community, subverting the values of our dominant society with kingdom of God priorities. It is to be radical, counter-cultural, and prophetic. It is to be a mobile and portable reservoir of kingdom-living that can be present and contextualized everywhere. Because the agenda of the *ekklesia* is the agenda of God's kingdom, its interests are not narrow but broadly inclusive of all things that impact the welfare of society as well as creation.<sup>1202</sup>

Such an understanding assumes that not only can the church affect society, i.e., has socio-political implications, but is the primary vehicle of God's politics in the world as it seeks to pledge allegiance first and foremost to God's will and purpose for his world.<sup>1203</sup> The church is, as Reinhard Hütter notes, a visible, concrete "new order" in history.<sup>1204</sup> It embodies the assumption that (social) change need not simply rest on the shoulders of the state as if the state is the only entity that can cause change and wield power. Rather, the church is but another social and political agent – with its

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<sup>1200</sup> These are the words of Gerald Gerbrandt as he describes the work of Harry Huebner. Gerald Gerbrandt, "Harry Huebner: A Servant of the Church," in *The Church Made Strange for the Nations: Essays in Ecclesiology and Political Theology*, ed. Paul G. Doerksen and Karl Koop (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 5.

<sup>1201</sup> Harry Huebner and David Schroeder, *Church as Parable: Whatever Happened to Ethics?* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: CMBC Publications, 1993), 180.

<sup>1202</sup> Suderman, *Re-Imagining the Church*, 10-11.

<sup>1203</sup> Arne Rasmussen, for example, describes this as "theological politics" which makes the church the primary locus for its politics according to its own agenda that challenges the way the world's politics is understood. See Rasmussen, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas*, 331. I am indebted to Paul Doerksen for highlighting the work of Rasmussen in his *Beyond Suspicion*, 13.

<sup>1204</sup> Reinhard Hütter, "The Church: Midwife of History or Witness of the Eschaton?," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 18 (Spring 1990): 47. I am indebted to Harry Huebner for highlighting the work of Reinhard Hütter. See Huebner, *Echoes of the Word*, 69-72.

particular form of power as seen most clearly in Jesus' cruciform *agape* love for the world – in the world as it seeks to participate in God's kingdom and embody the different way people who voluntarily commit to this kingdom can and should relate to one another. "The Anabaptists believed that the church as a whole was politically relevant because it bore witness to (was a sign of) an alternative way of living (God's preferred way) governed by the invitation of Christ to repent and be transformed by the renewal of mind and practice (Romans 12)."<sup>1205</sup>

### *Two Concrete Examples*

This section will offer two concrete examples that demonstrate how the above Anabaptist theological perspective is embodied, providing a contemporary Prophetic Theology in the South African context. The first is the work and witness of the Church Land Programme; the second is that of the Anabaptist Network in South Africa. This section will provide a brief account in how these two entities have developed and how their work and witness offers a Prophetic Theology.

#### 1) Church Land Programme

We begin with the Church Land Programme (CLP). CLP began in 1997 shortly after South Africa entered its new democratic dispensation in the midst of South Africa's TRC experiment. Front and centre in everyone's mind during this time was the question regarding the reparation or restoration required in light of the history of colonialism and apartheid. This was particularly true for those oppressed under apartheid. CLP began with a focus of connecting the different South African churches and their long history of land ownership with the democratic, post-apartheid state's quest to deal with the unjust manner in which land was taken.<sup>1206</sup> The – sometimes exaggerated – expectation of the South African church<sup>1207</sup> was that it would do "the

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<sup>1205</sup> Huebner, *Echoes of the Word*, 89.

<sup>1206</sup> Mark Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom," no. Occasional Paper No. 3 (2007), <http://www.churchland.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/OccasionalPaperNo3.pdf>. Accessed Mar. 6, 2017.

<sup>1207</sup> Understood primarily as institutional structures of denominations and ecumenical organizations (Butler et al., "Learning to Walk," 7).

right thing” regarding the land it owned and restore it to the Africans from which it was taken.<sup>1208</sup> “The land-owning churches felt this pressure.”<sup>1209</sup> They also saw the possibilities of using the government led land redistribution process as a way to contribute towards the desired justice and restoration, especially by transferring the land to the communities who now lived on it.<sup>1210</sup> CLP sought to work with these churches in wrestling with the new context and the expectations now projected onto them.

CLP’s take on these developments was always an attempt to maintain a careful line that tried to maximize the good possibilities offered by the new land context. These included opportunities to validate the contested history of church-land ownership, to recognise the important challenges that the new context raised for such churches, and to simultaneously insist that important questions and nuances not be ignored as the context and associated policy-framework unfolded.<sup>1211</sup>

This journey of walking with communities and churches “through the maze of land reform”<sup>1212</sup> provided an invaluable learning opportunity to clarify what CLP thought and, more importantly, practiced in wrestling with tough question in post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>1213</sup> What was perhaps most significant for CLP’s walk was learning, by analyzing the South African context through the lens of the land reform programme, that at “the heart of this South African state project, lay a capitalist restructuring and accumulation, as well as the creation of a somewhat de-racialised class of ‘elites’.”<sup>1214</sup> And this, inevitably, continued the exploitation, oppression, and disempowerment of the poor.<sup>1215</sup>

This realization caused CLP to carefully examine the role and practice of “civil society” – itself included – in relation to this state project.<sup>1216</sup> Its analysis

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<sup>1208</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 3.

<sup>1209</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 3.

<sup>1210</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 3. This observation should be particularly interesting given the analysis offered earlier, especially chapter four and five, regarding the shift towards relying on government structure and processes towards reconciliation, restoration, and reconstruction.

<sup>1211</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 3.

<sup>1212</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 4.

<sup>1213</sup> The result of which was CLP’s first “occasional paper” on land in South Africa. See Graham Philpott and Mark Butler, "Land in South Africa: Gift for All or Commodity for a Few?," (2004), <http://www.churchland.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/OccasionalPaperNo1.pdf>. Accessed Mar. 6, 2017.

<sup>1214</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 4.

<sup>1215</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 4.

<sup>1216</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 4.

recognized the incongruences and contradictions of the new democratic South African state. But it also highlighted how its own practice (and that of civil society generally) “felt out of step with these contextual realities. Somehow the way we were working as an NGO seemed to be in a pattern that depoliticised our contact with the landless poor, and stayed within the boundaries and bureaucracies of the official controlling system.”<sup>1217</sup> CLP came to realize how NGOs either assisted in keeping the legal processes of the government’s land reform program moving forward (largely uncritically) or determined the form in which interactions with grassroots people maintained the power within the NGOs whilst imposing their own analysis and agenda on the people. In this way CLP recognized how they, and civil society in general, were falling victim to Paulo Freire’s concern whereby

... certain members of the oppressor class join the oppressed in their struggle for liberation, thus moving from one pole of the contradiction to the other.... It happens, however, that as they cease to be exploiters or indifferent spectators or simply the heirs of exploitation and move to the side of the exploited, they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin: their prejudices and their deformations, which include a lack of confidence in the people’s ability to think, to want, and to know. Accordingly, these adherents to the people’s cause constantly run the risk of falling into a type of generosity as malefic as that of the oppressors. The generosity of the oppressors is nourished by an unjust order, which must be maintained in order to justify that generosity. Our converts, on the other hand, truly desire to transform the unjust order; but because of their background they believe that they must be the executors of the transformation.<sup>1218</sup>

Civil society, concluded CLP, had become conscripted into the developmentalist mode (a concern reminiscent of Michael Neocosmos provided in the previous chapter).<sup>1219</sup> Although some NGOs remained committed to supporting grassroot self-organization, and subsequent political action, most, CLP argues, have used grassroots people to serve their own development work or maintain the “middle stratum of society”<sup>1220</sup> which NGOs now occupied.<sup>1221</sup> This is apparent in the language used to describe the relationship between the church and the state since 1994; a move from “critical solidarity” to “critical engagement” to “partnership”.<sup>1222</sup>

<sup>1217</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 4-5.

<sup>1218</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 46.

<sup>1219</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 6.

<sup>1220</sup> Stephen Greenberg and Nhlanhla Ndlovu, "Civil Society Relationships," *Mobilising for Change: New Social Movements in South Africa, Development Update* 5.2 (2004): 32-33.

<sup>1221</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 7.

<sup>1222</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 7. See chapter four and five above regarding this shift.

This realization in CLP's own walk reinforced the need for further critical analysis regarding their particular South African context.<sup>1223</sup> It caused those at CLP to re-think some of their assumptions regarding the relation between freedom, the state, and political power.<sup>1224</sup>

For many of us, our tendency had been to assume that the interests of justice and freedom were more or less compatible with the new democratic state. But the reality of post-apartheid South Africa raised a more generalised question as to whether state power as *such* – and here we include all the apparatus that goes along with it (like representative democracy, political parties, etc.) – might not invariably be an oppressive and alienating force over people.<sup>1225</sup>

This affected CLP's own praxis. First, CLP felt it needed to learn from those who are poor. Second, if CLP wanted to work towards the possibility of transformation, freedom, and human dignity, then its practice as an organization would need to find ways of nurturing and learning “from the difficult task of building *actual* movements of *actual* ‘poors’, taking *self*-conscious, *self*-defined and *self*-initiated actions.”<sup>1226</sup> This meant learning to walk with, not for, those whom CLP wanted to support. “Changing the world meant changing the balance of power.”<sup>1227</sup> And for CLP this would need to begin with their own practice.<sup>1228</sup>

This “awakening” in CLP's own journey led towards a new understanding in how “politics” was (is) understood. CLP came to understand politics as those moments – emancipatory moments or ruptures within conventional social organization – where those who typically do not count in society, or those who do not have a voice (e.g., the poor), establish their own subjectivity thereby throwing off the oppression that comes from being objects of history and domination.<sup>1229</sup>

Under these conditions, politics is precisely the refusal to accept that the world-as-it-is determines what could be. The world-as-it-is is structured by an underlying architecture of institutions and ideas that seem to work together to uphold the state of

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<sup>1223</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 8.

<sup>1224</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 8.

<sup>1225</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 8.

<sup>1226</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 8.

<sup>1227</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 9.

<sup>1228</sup> CLP goes on to describe the practical changes they have incorporated into their practice and function as an NGO in the South African context. Although interesting and important this work will not provide an in-depth explanation about these practical changes in its shift towards animation. To explore this further see Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 10-33.

<sup>1229</sup> Mark Butler et al., "Finding Our Voice in the World," (2010), <http://www.churchland.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Finding-our-voice-in-the-world.pdf>. Accessed Mar. 6, 2017.

things in the interests of those who benefit from it. It's like a secret code of collaboration to create a certain mentality so that the people are more-or-less indoctrinated to accept the abnormal as normal; to accept it as 'reality' outside of which there is no serious alternative.<sup>1230</sup>

The "world-as-it-is", notes CLP, is the often-accepted hegemony of the state. Such hegemonic domination limits "creativity" to that which seeks survival given the oppressive state of things.<sup>1231</sup> CLP, however, in following Ranciere's depiction of politics as that which creates the possibility of what could be,<sup>1232</sup> has intentionally sought "to work within the spaces of the impossible possible."<sup>1233</sup> It is working for and in the moments of rupture within hegemonic domination. Such moments, as witnessed through its experience in walking with the poor, arise through a "living politics" which is "at a distance from the state".<sup>1234</sup> It is a form of politics that is the antithesis of the state's led model based on development or delivery. Indeed, "[i]f emancipatory politics is marked by this rupture with the state-of-things and by the active subjectivity of those who should be objects of this state, then the question arises: 'is real human freedom/liberation a possible outcome of any state of development and/or delivery?'"<sup>1235</sup> CLP's "theory of change", rather, assumes that the people, those who know and live with the realities of the world-as-it-is, must be the agents of human liberation. CLP's method and practice needs to function and reflect the creativity and agency of the marginalized themselves; "it needs to 'make rebellion ordinary' by locating it in the immediate life world of those who are dominated."<sup>1236</sup> This has led CLP to adopt the conviction (one among several), or one of its "principles of good stuff", that those who suffer it lead it.<sup>1237</sup> Thus CLP supports a vision of the world "where the poor resist the world-as-it-is and lead that struggle."<sup>1238</sup>

Given the above, CLP and its reflective praxis focuses on how to embody now the politics and relationships of what could be. "We believe *now* in the project of egalitarianism, and we demonstrate that belief through our praxis *now*..." (emphasis

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<sup>1230</sup> Butler et al., "Finding Our Voice in the World", 2.

<sup>1231</sup> Butler et al., "Finding Our Voice in the World", 2.

<sup>1232</sup> Butler et al., "Finding Our Voice in the World", 2.

<sup>1233</sup> Butler et al., "Finding Our Voice in the World", 2. This obviously also connects with Michael Neocosmos desire to pursue the "politics of the possible" seen earlier (cf. 229).

<sup>1234</sup> Butler et al., "Finding Our Voice in the World", 3.

<sup>1235</sup> Butler et al., "Finding Our Voice in the World", 2.

<sup>1236</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 12.

<sup>1237</sup> Butler et al., "Finding Our Voice in the World", 5.

<sup>1238</sup> Butler et al., "Finding Our Voice in the World", 6.

original).<sup>1239</sup> This was accentuated by one of CLP's participants: we must "taste the Kingdom here and now."<sup>1240</sup> "This seemed to us enormously evocative and powerful: It linked not only to a radical perspective found within eschatology, but also affirmed the need for 'prefigurative politics' which some (especially in the anarchist traditions) have always insisted is absolutely necessary if action is to produce future freedom."<sup>1241</sup>

Thus, although CLP does not often overtly use ecclesial language, it does explore and support the creation of communities that seek to enact an alternative politic, especially among the landless poor.<sup>1242</sup> Such communities embody a form of politics that arises from people's eagerness to reclaim their own agency, witnessing to a form of politics that would for them be "good news" in the South African context here and now. This does not necessarily mean that CLP is involved with establishing churches as such. To be the church also requires some conscious, intentional, and identifiable faith and commitment to Jesus as Christ and Lord.<sup>1243</sup> And yet, CLP and the communities it walks with do provide an example to the South African churches in what it means to be prophetic by embodying an alternative politic.<sup>1244</sup>

In summary, CLP provides a concrete example of a Prophetic Theology in the South African context. First, CLP embraces and operates according to a different –

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<sup>1239</sup> Butler et al., "Finding Our Voice in the World", 4. This builds on Alain Badiou's conception of fidelity to the event. See Alain Badiou and Oliver Feltham, *Being and Event*, Bloomsbury Revelations (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

<sup>1240</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 28.

<sup>1241</sup> Butler et al., "Learning to Walk - Ngo Practice and the Possibility of Freedom", 28-29.

<sup>1242</sup> Some of the communities with whom they work are [Abahlali baseMjondolo](#), a shackdwellers movement, the Poor People's Alliance, the Rural Network, a group of rural widows struggling around issues of land in what has become a predominately patriarchal society, along with several other communities.

<sup>1243</sup> See Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 145-54. In a particularly helpful and relevant footnote Volf explains that "the church can be found only where people confess Christ *consciously*, and not among the poor and oppressed simply as such.... This takes seriously not only the intimate connection between faith, baptism, and church membership in the New Testament, but also the self-understanding of the non-Christian poor and of those who perform acts of righteousness and compassion among them; they do not necessarily want to be 'anonymous Christians' or belong to a 'latent church.' At the same time, the presence of Christ is not restricted to the church; that is, Christ is not just active in a manner directly constitutive for the church.... This is why one can deny that the poor are a church without at the same time denying the presence of Christ among the poor – the fact that he commits himself to them as his 'brothers and sisters' (see Matt. 25:40) – or the activity of the Spirit in those who are engaged on their behalf.... As Moltmann correctly writes, the least among us do not tell us what or who the church is, but rather 'where the church belongs' (Moltmann, *Kirche*, 149, my emphasis)" (Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 151).

<sup>1244</sup> Although one may argue that, in utilizing a more ecclesial language, a more overt example may be given of churches seeking to embody Prophetic Theology.



and enacted – understanding regarding power. It is those who are suffering who lead the struggle; it is those who do not usually count in society who CLP pays attention to and listens to; and its whole practice augments the desire to animate the ones who typically are not perceived to have significant social influence. Second, CLP’s work is guided by the what could be, or what ought to be, rather than what currently is. Even if CLP rarely uses such language, this highlights its eschatological focus regarding its work. And third, CLP’s work seeks to intentionally embody, or put into practice, the convictions or principles it would like to see. The result of which are communities that embody the first two points – an alternative perspective regarding power and an eschatological vision – as a new form of politics. Although not always overtly expressed, such communities provide examples of what an alternative ecclesiology might also look like in the South African context. These three correspond to the suggested Anabaptist perspective offered in this chapter and how it may assist in reclaiming and re-embodiment of a Prophetic Theology in the South African context.<sup>1245</sup>

## 2) The Anabaptist Network in South Africa

A second example is that of the Anabaptist Network in South Africa (ANiSA). ANiSA emerged in 2009. As noted above, there is a long history of Mennonite involvement in South Africa. Many South Africans were either influenced directly through relationships with Mennonite workers or from a theology that resonated with South Africans in their struggle against apartheid and the violence and injustice that was endemic throughout its rule. ANiSA emerged after a series of gatherings between South Africans who had some form of connection with Anabaptism and different North American Mennonite organizations that were interested in learning how they

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<sup>1245</sup> It is not coincidental, for example, that the Director of CLP, Graham Philpott, has served on the Discerning Group of the Anabaptist Network in South Africa (ANiSA) since its inception in 2009. At the beginning of a paper presented at an ANiSA conference in 2012 Philpott says: “I want to take the liberty of sharing my reflections as a person of faith who is finding more and more resonance with Anabaptist expressions of that faith; a person asking questions of, and appalled by, the ‘state-we-are-in’; a person exploring ways of working with the impossible possible. I bring some reflections from our work within the Church Land Programme, and wish to explore whether our own reflections and practice resonate with some expressions of Anabaptism” (1). Taken from Graham Philpott, “An Un-Settled Theology,” in *Anabaptist Theologies in South Africa: Past, Present and Future* (Hermanus, Western Cape 2012).

could continue to walk with and support a radical Christian faith in what is still a new post-apartheid political dispensation.

From these discussions, ANiSA emerged as a network of people, churches, and organizations that, in drawing on the collective wisdom found within the Anabaptist movement, want to explore and embody a radical lifestyle centered around God's reconciling vision for the world.<sup>1246</sup> The hope of the network – one might call it its mission statement – is to walk with, support, and grow communities of peace, justice, and reconciliation within South Africa. ANiSA has up to this point focused on four key activities. The first has been connecting. ANiSA has tried to connect those within the network with one another, with other movements active in the pursuit of peace, justice, and reconciliation, as well as connecting those within the network with the global Anabaptist family. The second activity has been resourcing. ANiSA has sought to provide resources to those within the network as well be a resource. As many teachers, theologians, movement organizers, and so forth, are part of the network, ANiSA has tried to find ways in which one could resource another. ANiSA also has a growing library that circulated around the country. This was another form of resourcing. Third, ANiSA sought to share information. It sought to share what members (or Pilgrims as they are called) were doing, what was happening around the country, especially pertaining to issues of peace, justice, and reconciliation, and other perspectives that could help nourish a radical faith in Jesus Christ. Fourth, ANiSA sought to create spaces; spaces that operated according to an alternative politics.

As the reader will already surmise, space in the South African context (and I would argue that this is true globally) became highly contested and politicized. Space possesses symbolic meaning that points to what is important. It points to the nature and character of values and meaning. The segregated space of apartheid South Africa demonstrated what the apartheid system valued and what, or rather where, meaning was assumed to be found. During this system it was whites that mattered. And everything was organized to punctuate this – cities, transportation, jobs, privilege, toilets, and so forth. Space itself therefore became highly symbolic and politicized.

One of the central aspects of ANiSA's witness was the creation of spaces that possessed an alternative meaning and politics. Whereas during apartheid it was illegal for people of different races to share a meal together, worship together, live together,

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<sup>1246</sup> This is taken from the ANiSA webpage: <http://anisa.org.za>. Accessed Mar. 13, 2017.

and so forth, practices which, unfortunately, largely remain entrenched in the South African imagination, ANiSA has sought to create spaces that embrace and embody different expectations in how people would – and should – relate. ANiSA seeks to create spaces with an alternative politics: one where everyone matters; one where everyone belongs; one where friendship, camaraderie, fellowship, love, and community is created between all those of different races, denominations,<sup>1247</sup> and even nationalities.<sup>1248</sup> The creation of such alternative spaces is based on the desire to embody radical hospitality, which is the antithesis of apartheid and the social construction it created from which South Africa continues to struggle to step away. “ANiSA has become a place where those committed to a vision of Christian discipleship which insists that we need to discern the way of Jesus in our time and place, can challenge, encourage and support each other as we walk this way with Jesus.”<sup>1249</sup>

ANiSA highlights three particular core values:<sup>1250</sup>

- **Peace**, understood not as the mere absence of explicit violence, but as the foundation for God’s life-giving kingdom, is a key marker which describes ANiSA to us. Peace is not only a matter of what we *do*, but is rather who and how we *are* as we walk the way of peace.
- Closely connected to this is an emphasis on **justice** and on following in the ways of Jesus. The expression of shalom makes explicit the connection of peace and justice. This shalom embraces both the redistributive and restorative dimensions of justice, so fundamental in our South African context. This enables us to stand, witnessing to the restoring of relationships, the making whole of shattered communities, and the affirming of our dignity in the face of such prevalent dehumanisation.

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<sup>1247</sup> ANiSA has Pilgrims of many different denominational backgrounds: Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Pentecostal, African Initiated Churches (AICs), Dutch Reformed, Congregational, Lutheran, and so forth. As noted in a 2016 ANiSA “self-identity” document: “While some denominational expressions of church exist within South Africa which have a direct affiliation with the global Mennonite body, most individuals who have connected with ANiSA do not come from traditions historically affiliated with Anabaptism, but rather represent the full spectrum of church affiliations in South Africa: African Initiated Churches, so-called ‘mainline’ churches in all their traditionally European varieties, as well as Pentecostal and Charismatic churches” (Anabaptist Network in South Africa Discerning Group, “Anabaptist Network in South Africa (Anisa): Conscientisation and Presence - at a Distance from Power; the Journey Beyond 2016,” [South Africa: Anabaptist Network in South Africa, 2016], 2).

<sup>1248</sup> This is important to highlight given the ongoing xenophobia that exists in South Africa which erupts into violent attacks against those from other African nations. Such xenophobia is but another remnant of apartheid era logic whereby the desire expressed by those who want to get rid of those of other nationalities from South Africa do so by declaring the desire to be “good neighbours”. See, for example, King Goodwill Zwelithini’s speech of 20 March, 2015. This is the same logic that provided the foundation for apartheid and its policies.

<sup>1249</sup> ANiSA Discerning Group, “Conscientisation and Presence,” 2.

<sup>1250</sup> This is taken from ANiSA Discerning Group, “Conscientisation and Presence,” 2-3 (emphasis original).

- **Power** and its abuse has been a key feature of ANiSA's reflections and discernment. We make a conscious choice to walk the way of peace and justice in the South African context *at a distance from systemic and structural oppressive power*. Often we find that the church's work for peace and justice is reduced to a mere attempt to influence the political and economic powers of this day to be more closely aligned with a Christian vision, often resulting in the church being co-opted into various systems of power and oppression. This positioning at a distance from power has led to conscious choices for us to stand with the marginalised and their struggles for life and justice; as well as the creating of safe spaces where the dynamics of power are dismantled, there is a sense of belonging, and where everybody matters. This practice has its own particular costs, as it fundamentally disrupts the architecture of power in our society and gives expression to a new dynamic of collective thought and action – an assertion of the dignity and power of our humanity. Over the years it has therefore become of particular importance to us to experiment at working for peace and justice from a position at a distance from power, and to encourage others to reflect on what this would mean.

These core values have been expressed through different activities, some of them already mentioned (e.g., resourcing, connecting, and sharing information). Of particular importance is the way these values have shaped the work and witness of ANiSA. One such result that ANiSA notes is the way it has sought to “agitate the way we think” – “critically engaging the South African context in a way that explores and offers alternatives to the way society acts and thinks.”<sup>1251</sup> This has been particularly important in the way ANiSA has engaged the South African church and people of faith generally, asking what we are called to as Christians in the South African context today.<sup>1252</sup>

These values have also led to perhaps the most significant aspect of ANiSA's work:<sup>1253</sup> “the work of conscientisation and presence.”<sup>1254</sup>

We want to raise a particular consciousness amongst Christians which allows them to imagine what it would mean to work for peace and justice from a position at a distance from power. In doing so we hope to create a presence which ‘cracks’ the dominant belief that only through acquiring political or economic power can we bring about change in the world; and we seek to find ways of living in those cracks.<sup>1255</sup>

Mzwandile Nkutha, the Coordinator of ANiSA, highlights how “The Anabaptist Network in South Africa (ANiSA) has attempted to create space for a robust theological and political conversation around issues of justice, peace, and the re-

<sup>1251</sup> ANiSA Discerning Group, "Conscientisation and Presence," 3.

<sup>1252</sup> ANiSA Discerning Group, "Conscientisation and Presence," 3.

<sup>1253</sup> ANiSA Discerning Group, "Conscientisation and Presence," 3.

<sup>1254</sup> ANiSA Discerning Group, "Conscientisation and Presence," 3.

<sup>1255</sup> ANiSA Discerning Group, "Conscientisation and Presence," 3. The astute reader will see the strong connection with the work and thought of CLP. As noted earlier, the Director of CLP, Graham Philpott, has also served on the ANiSA Discerning Group.

imagination of power that identifies with the marginalized and their struggle for life and justice.”<sup>1256</sup>

Anabaptism in the South African context became equated with actively challenging injustice (e.g., the injustice of apartheid) in a nonviolent manner thus stepping outside of the cycle of ongoing violence.<sup>1257</sup> To do this Anabaptism in South Africa had to situate itself on the margins among those who the apartheid government oppressed. Nkutha says it well:

The black church in South Africa sought to decolonize and create a space for a new imagination beyond the apartheid theology of social, political, racial and economic segregation. Thus both narratives [, the black church and Anabaptism,] expressed an ecclesiology distant from the state hegemonic power. There is a compelling binary between black liberation theology within the South African context and [the] nonresistance and nonviolence posture [of Anabaptism], that speaks to the church identity in South Africa.

Anabaptism provides a theological and ecclesial perspective that refuses to move away from the margins. Instead it speaks from the margins. It is this kind of alternative ecclesial and theological politics that attracted me to explore Anabaptism. This is of utmost importance to me because colonialism and apartheid narrative has largely and in most ways negatively shaped the black church in South Africa.<sup>1258</sup>

In summary, ANiSA, in a very real and practical way, seeks to provide a glimpse – a taste – of the future that is desired by the way people treat and relate with one another. Indeed, members of the network often describe its gatherings as times when they experience what it truly means to be the church – a called out people that seeks to embody the politics of God’s kingdom. It offers an alternative ecclesiology in the South African context. It does this by trying to create spaces where a different political reality exists and is embodied; where love, radical hospitality, service and care for the other, the importance of everyone’s voice, and the pursuit of peace, justice, and reconciliation whilst embodying peace, justice, and reconciliation all seek to be embodied. In doing so, it puts into practice the perspective highlighted earlier. It assumes and operates according to an alternative understanding of power; its practice and what it tries to accomplish is informed by what one can describe as an eschatological vision; and it seeks to create and support communities who try to

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<sup>1256</sup> Mzwandile Nkutha, personal correspondence, 26 August 2016.

<sup>1257</sup> In this way Anabaptism, which also talked about finding a third way, was different than those theologies that fell into the category of Church Theology noted earlier (see chapter two). Anabaptism did not seek to be apolitical. Rather, as already noted in this chapter, Anabaptism sought to embody a radically different form of politics.

<sup>1258</sup> Nkutha.

embody these traits – i.e., it fosters an alternative community that offers an alternative ecclesiological experience and imagination.

Both CLP and ANiSA offer concrete examples in how an Anabaptist theological perspective offers a truly Prophetic Theology in the South African context as they enact – already now – an alternative political witness that seeks to be an example for the type of society that can be – an example of the impossible possible.

## *Conclusion*

The previous chapter noted Emmanuel Katongole's important question: Can we come to understand the church beyond a Christendom or Constantinian imagination? Can there be another story? Can there be "a story of self-sacrificing love that involves a different notion of power and thus gives rise to new patterns of life, engendering new forms of community, economics, and politics?"<sup>1259</sup> In short, is there another way in which the church can affect the way in which people can relate to one another; can the church provide another politic than that offered through the state? This chapter has attempted to highlight the way Anabaptism offers such an alternative story and perspective. It provides an alternative to the Christendom or Constantinian imagination. As such, given that Anabaptism, as a Christian faith perspective that emerged from and has often remained on the margins of the history of Christianity, it provides an alternative imagination that can assist the South African church to re-claim and re-embody a Prophetic Theology.

After offering a brief overview of Anabaptism, its history, and its character, this chapter looked at the way Anabaptism has influenced – or has arisen – in the South African context. This chapter then focused on an Anabaptist perspective regarding eschatology, power, and ecclesiology. The Anabaptist perspective on these three are not foreign to Prophetic Theology. A similar perspective existed (exists) within Prophetic Theology (as noted in chapter three). Unfortunately, these traits have not been overtly discussed in how they sustain a Prophetic Theology. The result of

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<sup>1259</sup> Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 20.

which has been its inability to sustain such a perspective and practice as South Africa entered its new post-apartheid political dispensation.

This chapter has suggested several reasons why an Anabaptist perspective regarding these three traits – power, eschatology, and ecclesiology – offers a more robust theological account and lived example that can help re-claim and re-embody a Prophetic Theology in the South African context. 1) Such a perspective pays attention to and operates from a larger eschatological vision. It assumes that the struggle for God’s kingdom continues despite the current political reality that may exist. 2) It operates according to an alternative understanding of power, one that does not operate according to the assumption that that which seems to be the most effective actually is. Instead, it operates according to the assumption that, even if a life of faithful discipleship to God and Jesus’ politics leads to one’s own death – i.e., a cruciform life – God has demonstrated through the resurrection that the cross – i.e., death – is not the final word. This, therefore, provides a foundation whereby alternative relationships can be formed. Indeed, this alternative relationship truly becomes that which provides meaning in life. Such a foundation does not presuppose that a) the mandate of the church is to find the most effective way of ensuring that society is “Christian,” which the state must therefore embrace and enforce (this is the hallmark of a Christendom or Constantinian imagination), or b) assume that the state is the only entity for social change. This Anabaptist perspective regarding power and who possesses it provides, in other words, a foundation for an alternative political witness in the world. And 3) the church becomes an alternative community that provides such a lived political witness in the world. Larry Miller offers a great summary of the Anabaptist ecclesial perspective and assumption: “How can the old structures of injustice be transformed? By spreading the new structures. Jesus announces a new social order.... You can change structures by *being* the messianic community, by *being* the new, just structure.”<sup>1260</sup>

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<sup>1260</sup> Larry Miller, “What does ‘Peace Church’ Mean?” From Church and Peace Steering Committee Meeting, Versailles, October 1977 as quoted in Ehrenpreis et al., *Brotherly Community--the Highest Command of Love: Two Anabaptist Documents of 1650 and 1560*, vii.

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## Conclusion

As its subtitle suggests, the *Kairos Document* proved to be a “challenge to the church.” Its critique of “State Theology” and “Church Theology” confronted all of the churches that either supported and justified apartheid and its ideology or sought to remain neutral and distant from actively struggling against the apartheid government. It asked the pertinent question as to where each church – not just its leadership – stood (sometimes literally!) in relation to the apartheid system. Ultimately it challenged the whole South African church to actively participate in the struggle against apartheid, thereby embracing what it described as “Prophetic Theology”.

The manner in which the KD was created was also an expression of the Prophetic Theology it advocated. The process already began to embody an alternative politics – an alternative way in which people related – in the midst of the political social structure the apartheid government sought to establish and maintain. Indeed, it was another expression alongside a long line of prophetic acts in South Africa. The KD was another participant in a long-standing prophetic tradition.

Unfortunately, although the KD emerged from and embodied a prophetic form of theology, the “Prophetic Theology” that it articulated was not sustained, neither in its theological expression nor as ecclesial strategy. With the demise of the apartheid government in 1994, Prophetic Theology all but dissipated. A significant reason for this is that “Prophetic Theology” fell back into the Constantinian assumptions that portrayed the state as the entity responsible for the political realities of society and the church has having the primary responsibility for the care of the spiritual health of its members and that of the nation’s citizens. The church, if it was indeed involved in the struggle against the apartheid government, did not exercise its political voice and stepped away from its own political commitments. “Prophetic Theology” seemed unnecessary after 1994. It shifted, rather, to a focus on reconstruction. Indeed, many



of the leaders who were seen as “prophetic” in the struggle against apartheid entered the corridors of the state. Thus, the *embodied* alternative political witness that makes Prophetic Theology prophetic dissipated in the post-apartheid South African context.

This thesis has shown that even those who desire to re-claim Prophetic Theology in the South African post-apartheid context remain shackled to a Constantinian imagination. They continue to assume that the church is an advocate to government which in turn has the responsibility to act in challenging injustice, corruption, violence, and unemployment. The assumption, in other words, remains that the best the church can do is to try to influence the government to act on these social ills. The assumption remains, however, that the state is the entity responsible for the way society can and should relate – i.e., for the political realities of society. This is, perhaps, best depicted in the common aphorism of “speaking truth to power”. By portraying the state as the entity that possesses the power, it dismisses other forms of power available to the church as it witnesses to an alternative power and politics than that of the government.

This work has focused on three theological traits that have contributed to the failure in sustaining Prophetic Theology in the post-apartheid era. The anemic eschatological focus of “Prophetic Theology” did not provide ongoing vision for the continuation of the struggle required until the full arrival of God’s kingdom. As such, the demise of the apartheid government was seen as the arrival of the *eschaton* – the task was finished. What has become apparent is that the struggle for right relationships did not end in 1994. The challenge of living rightly with one another, especially after such a long history of injustice, violence, pain, and suffering, must continue. This is the church’s task – to pursue and embody the desired *shalom*.

Second, this study has demonstrated how “Prophetic Theology”, although critical of the apartheid government, has maintained an optimistic view of the inherent benevolence of the state once in the hands of the formerly oppressed. As such, “politics” – the concern regarding the communal life within the *polis* – was once again handed over to the new democratic state. In spite of a long tradition whereby the church offered an alternative politic, with the demise of apartheid this was assumed to be superfluous. Politics was re-defined. It became the task of the government rather than the responsibility of every person. Whereas those who participated in the struggle against apartheid understood themselves to be agents of power, after 1994 power was handed over to the state as its rightful wielder. People who served in the

government became those “in power”. This changed the conception of power itself. Rather than understanding power as egalitarian and bottom-up, as it was understood during the struggle, power has become an authoritarian way of exerting control and influence in the power-apartheid era. As such, it is incredibly disempowering for the people of South Africa.

Lastly, this study has suggested that “Prophetic Theology” failed to fully comprehend the nature of the church as an alternative politic within the realities of empire. Although that which was truly an embodiment of Prophetic Theology offered an alternative political witness in the midst of colonial and apartheid segregating practices, the attempt to articulate a “Prophetic Theology” provided an under-rated perspective regarding the church as a counter-political entity. This weakness is increasingly becoming evident.

In response to this analysis regarding South African political theology, this study has proposed that Anabaptism, a faith movement that emerged during the Reformation, offers helpful perspectives regarding the relationship between church and state. It provides ecclesial and theological perspectives that may assist in reclaiming and re-embodying a Prophetic Theology in South Africa. Specifically, it offers three perspectives that may prove helpful. First, is a deeper eschatological perspective, one grounded in a vision of God’s coming kingdom, that continues to nourish an ongoing struggle towards the realization of such a vision. Second, it understands each and every person and the communities they form as agents of power. It assumes that each person can be a vehicle for God’s activity in the world should they respond to the invitation to participate in God’s will for the world. It is a power based on invitation and hospitality rather than coercion and imposition. Lastly, Anabaptist ecclesiology presupposes that an alternative exercise of power is a voluntary choice to embody a lifestyle that witnesses to the eschatological hope of God’s coming Kingdom. It is a lifestyle of discipleship: walking in the ways of Jesus in the here and now. This ecclesiological perspective offers an alternative communal politics to that of the state. Its focus is to embody and strive towards living in right relationships with others, with creation, and with God.

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